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MINUS DANGER!

by GEORGE O. SMITH

A NOVEL OF TOMORROW'S DESTINY

MINION OF CHAOS

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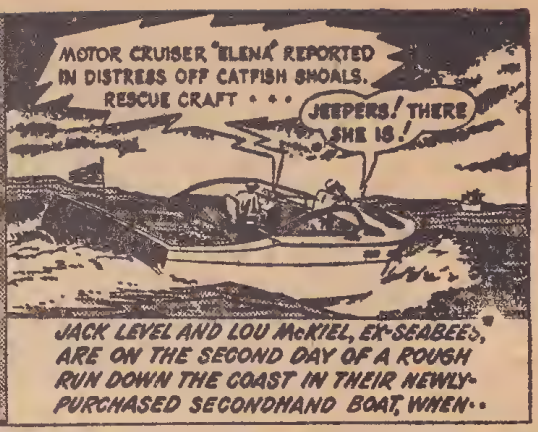
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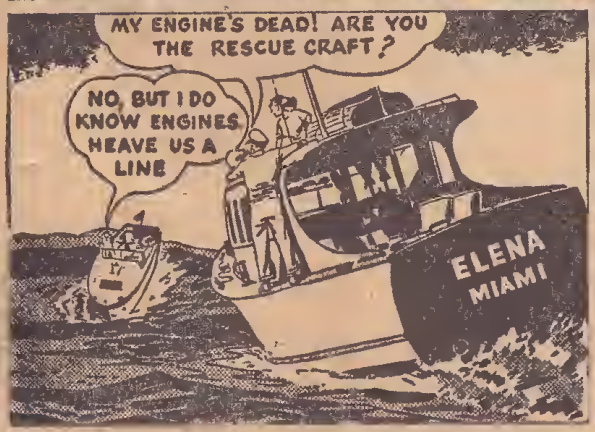
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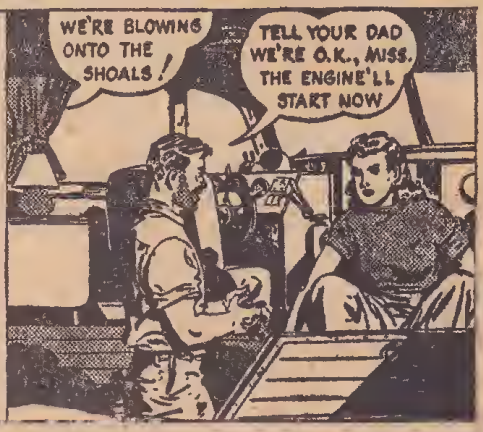
JACK PLAYED IN LUCK WHEN...



JACK LEVEL AND LOU McKIEL, EX-SEABEES, ARE ON THE SECOND DAY OF A ROUGH RUN DOWN THE COAST IN THEIR NEWLY-PURCHASED SECONDHAND BOAT, WHEN..



20 MINUTES LATER













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VOL. 5 SEPTEMBER, 1949 No. 4

THREE UNFORGETTABLE NOVELS

MINION OF CHAOS John D. MacDonald 8
Wisdom was his destiny—learn and conquer his creed . . . until in an atom-scarred universe there was but one thing left to overcome—Man;

MINUS DANGER! George O. Smith 66
From tiny nonexistence, Man's brightest highest attainment grew to an enormous nothing—a nothing vast enough to engulf not only him —but his universe!

THE METAL MOON Neil R. Jones 102
In the wandering heart of an exploded moon, the metal men found a peril greater than they had ever faced—the eight-armed Arnolascs of Dwom, who made gods of strangers—and destroyed their gods!

SHORT STORIES

BRIDE OF ETERNITY Margaret St. Clair 36
She had waited eons for her subjects—until the dark day she awoke to a world too cruel to love her, yet too fond to let her die!

THE MINIATURE Peter Reed 46
In the vault, he knew nothing of his long journey between birth and death. . . . But what dreams disturbed the sleep of this man, whose body was more precious than diamonds?

WORLD OF NO RETURN Bryce Walton 56
Under the twin moons of Mars, Cliff, the Earthman, could not live . . . and Della, poor misguided Della, could not die!

STAR-BROTHER Stanley Mullen 88
Dying Earthman and deathless Venusian, they joined in the strangest comradeship the stars had seen . . . to build, from its mind wrenching horror, a barrier that would forever preserve their planets!

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Illustrations by Lawrence, Finlay, Van Dongen, Paul and Leydenfrost
Cover by Lawrence

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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POPULAR FILMS

Good Movie-Going For Fiction Fans

Ted Palmer Picks:

For A Western—"Roughshod" with Robert Sterling, Gloria Grahame and Claude Jarman, Jr. (RKO).



As if they didn't have trouble enough, a quartet of women from the dance hall at Aspen, Nevada, join up with Clay and Steve Phillips (Robert Sterling and Claude Jarman, Jr.) who are headed for California with a herd of blooded horses. To make matters worse, an ex-convict is gunning for Clay. The brothers manage to get rid of all the women except Mary (Gloria Grahame) who has taken a shine to Clay—but Clay isn't taking. That is, until after a rip-roaring gunfight during which the outlaw bites the dust. *A "western" proving that men are still men.*

• • •

For Suspense—"House of Strangers" with Edward G. Robinson, Susan Hayward and Richard Conte (20th Century-Fox).



The strangers in this house are the four Monetti brothers. The story is of Max Monetti's (Richard Conte) personal vendetta against the others for allowing him to go to prison while trying to save their father (Edward G. Robinson) from jail. It's the love of a woman (Susan Hayward) and the final realization of how futile his motives are that saves Max. In between, *this film develops plenty of chair-gripping tension.*

• • •

For Romantic Adventure—"The Great Sinners" with Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Melvyn Douglas, Walter Huston and Ethel Barrymore (MGM).



Peck's a writer, Ava's his girl, Huston's her father, Melvyn's the churl. Mix them all up in a European gambling casino around 1860 and you have a story. Pauline Ostrovsky and her father (Ava Gardner and Walter Huston) have gambling in their blood—not so writer Peck. But when the Ostrovsky chips go down—and down, Peck risks his own money to prevent Pauline from marrying the cad, Armand De Glasse (Melvyn Douglas), for his money. Peck loses at the wheel—and loses spiritually. He finally regains mastery of both—and the girl. *A well-played tale.*

• • •

For Comedy—"Sorrowful Jones" with Bob Hope and Lucille Ball (Paramount).



Damon Runyon's wonderful story of bookmakers, mobsters and "little Miss Marker" is retold here with Bob Hope in the title role. Filled with typical Hope clowning, Runyonesque characters like "Regret," "Big Steve," "Once Over Sam" and the beauteous Lucille Ball, this picture makes the best of a good story. Briefly, Sorrowful, as a miserly bookmaker, accepts a five year old girl as a marker for a bet on a fixed horse race. When the child's father is liquidated by the mob for trying to "unfix" the race, Hope takes it upon himself to protect her from the gang. In the end, the thugs are outwitted and everyone lives happily ever after. *This is an hilarious Hope vehicle for all.*

• • •

For Music—"Look for the Silver Lining" with June Haver, Ray Bolger and Gordon MacRae (Warner Brothers) Technicolor.



Perhaps all won't remember Marilyn Miller—one of the greatest musical comedy stars ever—but everybody will recognize the many tuneful and nostalgic melodies that stud this screen portrayal of her life. With June Haver as the star; Ray Bolger as Jack Donahue, one of the inspirations in her life, and Gordon MacRae playing Frank Carter, her first husband, this picture tells Marilyn's story of devotion to the stage. From her very first appearance as a child with the "Four Columbians" to her final performance in "Sally", she and all about her were a part of the theatre. Musical memories include "Who", "Sunny", "A Kiss in the Dark", "Time on My Hands", and, of course, the title piece. *A skillful blend of fact and music, solidly entertaining.*

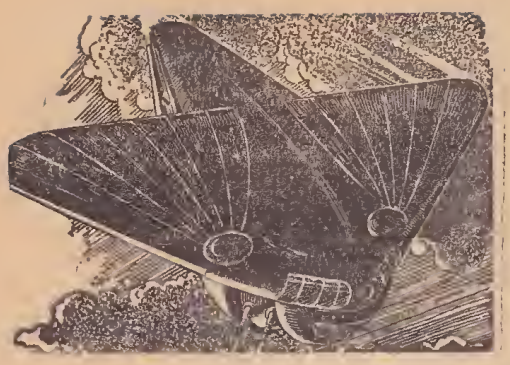
• • •

For Sports—"The Great Dan Patch" with Dennis O'Keefe, Gail Russell and Ruth Warrick (United Artists).



The greatest pacing horse of them all was Dan Patch, and this is his story—more or less. He gets born, trained, raced on the Grand Circuit and made a champion. There's also some kind of plot involving people, but *you'll be most interested in the harness racing on which this film is based.*

FANDOM'S CORNER



Conducted By James V. Taurasi

STF AWARDS COMMITTEE CANCELED

ONE WEEK before the organization meeting of the science Fiction Awards Committee was to be held (see this column, April SUPER SCIENCE) Ray Van Houten announced that too few organizations had responded to the call and thus the meeting would have to be canceled. Of the professional, only Popular Publications, publishers of this magazine, FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES and FANTASTIC NOVELS had appointed a delegate to the meeting. Of the fan organizations, Fandom House and the New Orleans Science Fantasy Society had appointed delegates and had made arrangements to attend. We're sorry the project didn't pan out.

A FAN ARTISTS' FOLIO

The Fantasy Artisans' Club has just published the fan field's version of the famous Lawrence and Finlay folios. Ten fan artists are presented, each with one full-page drawing. The folio is photo-offset and is one of the best things we've seen fandom do in a long, long time. For information, write to S, F, & S.F. Amateur Press, P.O. Box 696, Kings Park, L.I., New York.

FAN MAG REVIEWS

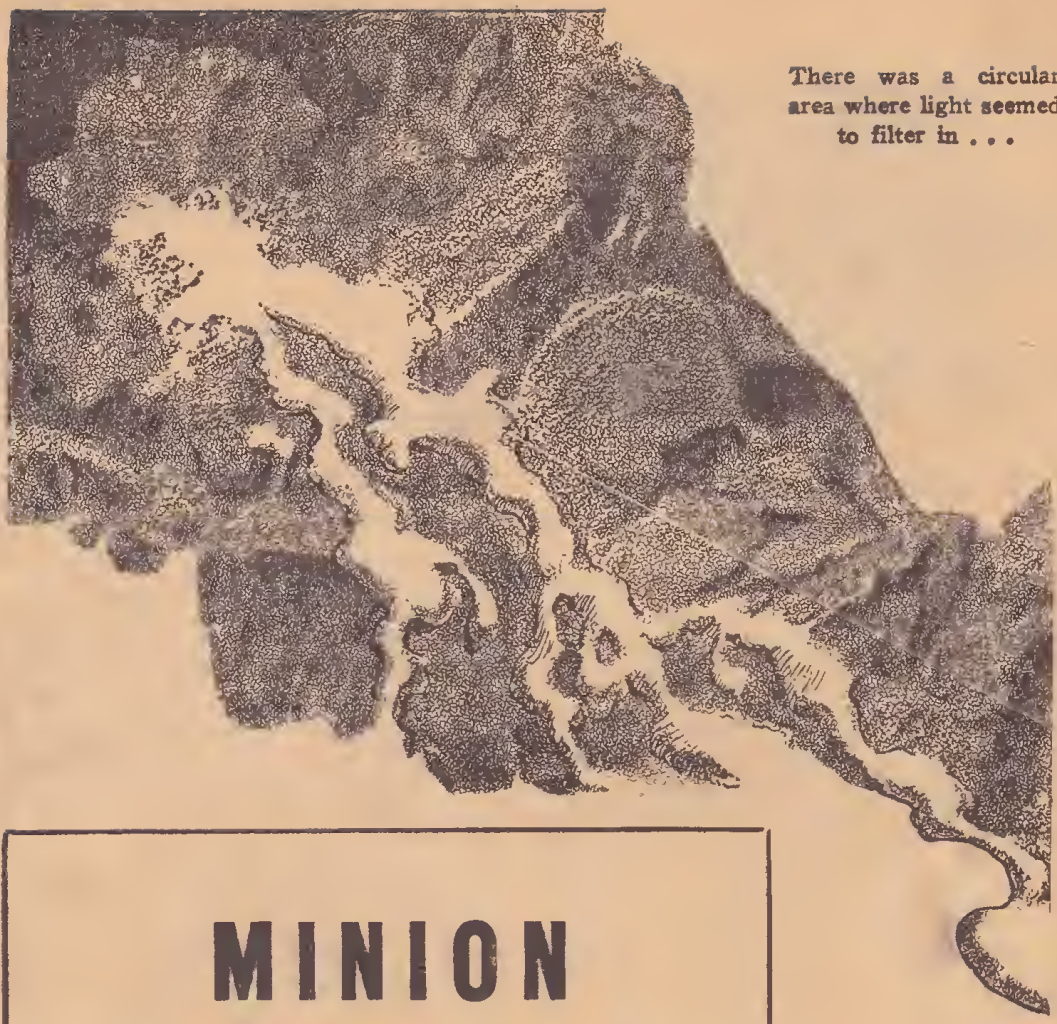
Fantasy Review, April - May 1949, published bi-monthly by Walter Gillings, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex, England, 25¢. This is the best fan mag published in England today and one of the finest of all. 32 printed pages, small size, copiously illustrated —fan news, pro news, book reviews, etc. It really covers the field. You'll like this one.

Fantasy-News, published weekly by Will Sykora, P.O. Box 4, Steinway Station, Long Island City, New York, 10¢. After years of sleep this old-timer returns as a printed 2-pager, large size. At this writing 8 issues have appeared. The issue of May 29, 1949 concerns itself mostly with the May meeting of the Queens SFL.

The Cincy Report, No. 3, published now and then by the Convention Committee, who will be hosts at the World Science Fiction Convention this year. This issue reports that Ted Carnell of England will be the fan guest of honor at the Convention, and author L. A. Eshbach will be the professional guest of honor. For full information write to Don Ford, Box 116, Sharonville, Ohio.

The Fanscient, Spring 1949, published quarterly by the Portland S.F.S., 3435 N.E. 38th Ave., Portland 13,

(Continued on page 129)



There was a circular area where light seemed to filter in . . .

MINION OF CHAOS

Wisdom was his destiny — learn and conquer his creed . . . until in an atom-scarred universe there was but one being left to overcome—Man!

CHAPTER ONE

The Global Rat Trap

IT WAS, he thought, very much like being a rat in a maze, with a very aseptic death around the next corner. The rat, being a rat, suspects the imminence of death, but can make no counter-offensive.

It had been building for a long time. He felt it in the studied casualness of his fellow-workers, and in the new

A Novel By John D. MacDonald



. . . He cut the tunnel rapidly ahead, recklessly letting the liquid run over his feet. . . .

alertness of the hated monitor, Miss Ellen Morrit.

A nice clean life, they had said, You'll be well-protected. The police won't let the nasty people tear you to death. We hope.

He sighed, turned on the stool and looked back over his shoulder, seeing his name printed in reverse, showing through the translucent glass of the laboratory door. Peter Lucas.

He wondered where he had slipped. And he wondered whether the danger of slipping, the fatal effects of a slip, were coloring his judgment. Maybe Ellen Morrit wasn't being quite so beady-eyed after all.

No, they were onto him the same

way they would be onto any other defective bit of material.

Ellen Morrit sat on a high stool beside the laboratory table. She said dryly, "Through working for the day, Mr. Lucas?"

He looked at her, wondering for the thousandth time why they didn't dress female employees of the Bureau of Improvement in a more becoming uniform. She was a white starched tube with a severe face at one end and slim ankles at the other. Nice hair, though, under a little gold cap.

"Why are you staring at me, Mr. Lucas?"

"For a reason that would horrify your factual little mind, sugar bun. How many years have we been sharing this cubicle?"

"Three years, four months and—and nine days," she said firmly.

"Too long. What do you say we get married?"

She lifted her chin. She quoted from the manual, " 'All technical employees of the Bureau of Improvement are forbidden to marry because of the possibility of their aptitudes being to some degree heriditary characteristics.' "

"But they'll let a colorless reactionary like you marry?"

She gave him one of her rare smiles; but her gray eyes didn't smile at all. "As soon as my five years are up, Mr. Lucas."

"May you be blessed with numerous ice-cream cones."

He stood up, filled with the familiar dull anger, and walked over to the wide window. His lab was on the tenth floor of the Bureau of Improvement Building. He looked out across the expanse of grass, to the distant flight towers, the wide pastel expanse of the New City. It had a fairy-land look; the architects had been infatuated with tower and minaret.

Yet Peter felt himself drawn to some of the less decayed buildings in the dead city off to the left. A mound of rubble separated the two. In the New City there were cars, pedestrians, glittering shops, gay clothes and the best of music.

In the dead city were the hiding places of the unfit.

He felt her beside him and he defiantly pointed to the mouldering lines of a gray building in the old city, the dead city.

"They had the right idea, Morrit. Look at that. Functional and sweet and clean. They were headed in the right direction."

She said thoughtfully, "That's a curious statement, Mr. Lucas. You used the phrase 'headed in the right direction.' That is indicative of the basic flaw in your thinking. We do not 'head' in any direction. We've achieved a static, unified community, and we are satisfied."

He laughed. "You mean you're dead, Morrit. We're on a big highway leading toward extinction. A nice flat, broad, smooth highway. We've forgotten an old rule—progress or perish."

"That has been proven false, Mr. Lucas. You must know that. You must know that it is only through the very extreme liberalism of Chairman Ladu, that you are . . ."

"Permitted to exist at all? How nice of Emery!"

"Thirty years ago, Mr. Lucas, as soon as your aptitudes had been discovered through the use of the integrated tests you would have been painlessly . . . removed, probably at the age of twelve."

"And you're sorry we aren't still on that basis."

Her gray eyes widened in anger and she turned away. "I see no necessity for improvements," she said. "Repair

and control is all that is necessary."

"If they'd turn me loose, baby, you'd really see some improvements." Lucas gestured toward the tiny motor strewn on his bench. Assembled, it was no larger than a peach pit. "That turns out a quarter horse. But it'll never be much better because the Code restricts us to minor variation within the approved method. On my own I'd try new methods, new procedures. I might get five horse out of it—or five hundred and then . . ."

"Be quiet!" she said, her lips thin and tight.

He smiled lazily as he went back to his chair. "I forgot, Morrit. Science is a nasty word. There is an approved list of beneficial devices. Radio, television, the internal combustion engine, electricity, subsonic aircraft, telephone, structural plastics, hydroponics. None of those things give you a fear reaction. But we leave the knowledge barrier of electronics right where it is. And we never, never, never mess with atomics any more. Or planetology, or rockets, or weather control. Never, never."

HE SAW that she was composing herself with an effort. She climbed back on her stool with a lithe motion. "I am not here to discuss this matter with you, Mr. Lucas. I was given a technical background only so that I can determine when you try to step outside the approved limitations. You and men like you are as dangerous to this civilization as uncontrolled fire. That is why you are watched so carefully. If you persist in continuing this discussion, I will report you to the Chief of the Bureau of Improvement."

Lucas sighed. "Okay, lady. Okay." He picked up a pair of tweezers, used them to pick up the tiny brushes. He held them up. "Just so you can follow me. This little pin here which supports the brushes is okay. The self-lubricating bearings are okay. But the airseal is bad and dust has leaked in and turned the lubricating agent to an abrasive, thus wearing down the pin until the brushes get an eccentric wobble. My next step will be to look up the table of rubber substitutes and find something we can use for the airseal, something that will have a longer life. Okay with you?"

Once again she quoted from the manual. "'It is the responsibility of the monitor to determine that all research is along approved lines and to report any suspected variance to the Floor Monitor for investigation. In no case will the monitor express an opinion about research which falls within the approved fields.'"

Once again her face was calm and composed. Lucas snorted, crossed over to the book shelf, brought back the rubber substitutes manual, looked up the proper table and made notations on a pad.

He took the bill of materials for the tiny motor, drew a neat line through the specification for the airseal, lettered in the symbol for the new material, put the bill of materials and the faulty seal in a manila envelope, shoved the rest of the motor parts into the scrap bin. One tiny screw somehow became caught in the fold of flesh at the base of his thumb. He turned back toward the window and idly picked at his tooth with his thumbnail. As he did so he rolled the little screw up until he could grasp it with his thumb and finger. He inserted it into the painful cavity in a back molar from which he had extracted the filling the night before.

In search, the little screw would give the same metallic index as the filling.

The nerve was raw and pain screamed at him. But he smiled, yawned and said, "Morrit, we'd better call it a day."

She glanced at the clock. "Ten more minutes."

"Too late to start a new one." Once again he looked toward the dead city, toward that decaying functional building. "Morrit, did you ever think about the dead city? About the reason for it?"

This time her quote was taken from the Approved World History. " 'With the continual shrinkage of population, many cities were completely abandoned because of unsatisfactory climate or other factors, while, in the more desirable cities, the oldest parts were abandoned, the remaining inhabitants taking over the most desirable portions.' "

"Quoting and thinking are two different things, sugar bun. Once there were five million people in this city. Now what are there? Eight hundred thousand? Maybe we're just genetically weary, Morrit. Dame Nature is dwindling us down to fit in the barren world we've made for ourselves."

Morrit did not quote. Her eyes narrowed. "And who was to blame, Mr. Lucas? The black-hearted men of progress. They blasted the earth and killed so much of the soil that millions starved. That's why they'll be forever hated by the race. And they called themselves 'creators' and 'scientists.' You should feel shame when you think those thoughts, Mr. Lucas. Because you are one of them. Oh, we have you under rigid control now. You can't do us any harm. You are the servant of the race, like fire. We direct your efforts."

Lucas ran his hand through his cropped dark hair, his strong lean face oddly twisted. "Morrit, why is it that we can't think the same way at all? Why is this wall between us all the time?"

She quoted from the manual. " 'Scientific aptitude is a dangerous mutational characteristic which blinds the individual to anything except his creative desires, making it impossible for him to understand the strict channeling of his efforts into those fields which will benefit mankind without opening the doorways to unknown terrors.' "

Lucas controlled his anger by biting down on the tiny screw, forcing it into the naked nerve, leting pain drain the fury from him.

Suddenly very tired, he said, "The ten minutes are up, my love."

THE HIGH fence bordered a narrow area half a mile long, leading to the small white houses provided for the workers at the Bureau of Improvement.

Peter Lucas, dressed in his street clothes, waited until several others had gone through search. When there were ten, a Bureau guard walked with them over to the housing area.

The precaution dated from the time when a mob had broken through the fence and torn three workers apart. Sometimes, even now, the heritage of sullen hate exploded into mob fury.

Lucas noticed that the other nine greeted him with less than their usual friendliness. Word must be getting around that he was marked as uncontrollable.

In the old days that would have meant a quick, painless death. But they had devised a new sort of death: a death of the mind. The electric knife would make a neat incision, cutting away memory and ability. Then the walking and talking school for the

period of incontinence; and a nice manual labor assignment.

They arrived at the small white house. There were sixty of them. It was a pitifully small number of workers, sixty men to carry on every bit of scientific effort in the world. And even that was a joke. They were not research workers; they were mechanics.

From the doorway of his quarters he could see, ten miles from the city, the myriad shining towers of World Administration. When all governments had disintegrated, after the brutal impact of the Three Wars, the men who had seized power had a knowledge of propaganda. Emery Ladu was called the Chairman, not the Dictator or King.

Ladu's palace was the World Administration Building. There he met with his five Princes, one from each world mass. Only they were called Unit Advisors. Lin of Eurasia Unit. Morol of Africa Unit. Frisee of Australia Unit. Ryan of North America Unit. Perez of South America.

The World Administration Building was the symbol of their reign. In some secret place a young man was being trained for each of them; a man to take each position. It was defense in depth. Nothing was left to chance.

There was no population pressure any more. And with the passing of this pressure, the prime motivating force for war vanished. The standard of living was built on an economy of abundance. And the abundance was a legacy from the billions who had inhabited the earth. In all the vacant houses of the dead cities of the world there were the pots and pans and chairs and tables free for the taking.

With design made static, except for minor and unimportant improvements, there was no obsolescence of mechanical things. With adequate care, a car of popular make would last several generations.

This was the only world Peter Lucas knew. It had been, at one time, a good world. There had been a home and comforting warmth and the old books which told of cowboys and soldiers. He had taken the examinations when he was twelve.

And then there had been tears in that home, tears and strangeness: a restraint that showed his parents' grief . . . as though they had discovered he was something monstrous and obscene, and their love for him fought against this new knowledge.

That year there had been three hundred thousand children. Each year there were less. Before Ladu's edict, in the old days, there would have been an efficient use of anaesthesia. The race had been cutting out the cancerous growth that insisted on returning with each generation.

Later, there would have been the electric knife and three hundred thousand mindless children to be sent to the protected schools, not sent back to their homes because, with the hate and fear in the hearts of men, there was no guarantee that these mindless ones would be permitted to live, once having evidenced the forbidden abilities —mathematical and mechanical ability, a creative turn of mind, an overweening curiosity.

They would form the labor pool after training.

But in the year that Peter Lucas had been one of the three hundred children, they had been gathered in the pens in the salt flats and there had been more examinations, more intricate tests.

Peter Lucas and four others had been selected and sent to a special

school which used the forbidden books and taught forbidden knowledge. At twenty he had been assigned to the Bureau of Improvement. Ladu had set it up with a fixed quota of sixty. Each year five children would be withdrawn from those who were to be made nearly mindless. Each year five young men were graduated from the special school. And each year the five most unstable of the workers at the Bureau of Improvement were subjected to the electric knife.

In two more weeks the new ones would arrive. And Peter Lucas knew that he had won himself extinction through his attitude.

He went into his two-room house. It had the barren simplicity of a cell. Directly above the television screen was the microphone which recorded every sound from the house, every fragment of conversation.

The house was clean and shining. His evening meal was under the glass dome on the tiny steam table. The food would keep warm. During the next hour he was permitted to exercise in the small area allotted to him. From then on he would be restricted to his house. Any request to visit another worker had to be submitted in writing and approved two weeks in advance of the date. Such visits were limited to one hour and a guard was detailed to escort the visitor to the door of the worker he wished to visit, and wait there to escort him back.

It had been a long time since Peter Lucas had had a visitor, or had visited anyone.

He took a long shower, turned on the television screen and watched the insipid entertainment while he ate. It was a melodrama. The villain was a man who had somehow escaped the screening tests and was working on a secret weapon to destroy the world. The hero killed the villain just as he was about to loose his weapon. It ended with a little sermon.

He felt the tension mounting in him as he ate, and he forced himself to smoke a leisurely cigarette. He knew that while he was at work the house had been carefully inspected for any evidence of forbidden experimentation.

He went to his bed, stretched out and let his left hand fall, almost as though by accident, against the cool, smooth plastic of the wall. The wax was still firm in the grooves he had cut with the tiny saw. He slowly exhaled, the tension going out of him.

With a thumbnail he pared the wax away, slid the tiny panel down, removed therefrom the device which had occupied his mind for six years, which had kept him from going quietly mad under the restraint, as had so many others.

Each bit of it had been smuggled past the search.

The lead for the little half-pound cup had been brought out, a gram at a time. He had melted it and moulded it with the heat obtained by making a minor adjustment in the heat coils on the steam table.

The infinitesimal tube, socketed in the lead cup, had been the most difficult. He had waited for fourteen months to smuggle that out. First it had been necessary to mold soft rubber around the tube, make a crude slingshot, wait until Morrit left the room for a few minutes, stretch the spring wire across the window and project the little ball of sticky rubber out so that it fell in the fenced passage.

Heartbreakingly, he had missed the passage with the first two tries. The third tube had landed properly. On his way back to his house that night he had located it, and, not daring to bend over, had stopped, pressed his

heels together so that the rubber clung to the inside of one shoe.

Four lengths of silver wire, forced into the edge of the lead cup, focused the energy of the tube. Each silver wire was forty millimeters long. Halfway along their length, suspended by spiderweb strands of copper wire, was a crude open-ended tube of lead, the opening pointing toward the tiny, powerful tube socketed in the lead cup.

Midway in the little cylinder of lead was a milligram of an unstable isotope which he had found five years before, secreted in one of the forbidden books, probably hidden there by a desperate man during the science purge.

The device was pathetically small, and his theories of its operation were necessarily vague due to his directed training. With an adequate power source, which he hoped to obtain in the form of one of the tiny powerful batteries used in wrist radios, hearing aids and similar devices, the activated tube would subject the isotope to a stimulus which would, he hoped, cause it to throw off, like bullets from a gun, a stream of focused matter which would stimulate the molecular activity of any inert substance. Arbitrarily assuming that the difference between a liquid, a solid and a gas lay only in the index of molecular activity, he hoped to be able to turn any solid into a liquid and then a gaseous state.

Behind the lead cup was a metallic frame for the battery. He took the screw from the tooth cavity, used it to make rigid another portion of the battery frame.

To complete it he would need the battery and a thin strip of hard copper. The completed device would be held in one hand, the battery against the heel of his hand, the wires pointing away from him. Firing would be accomplished by pressing the copper strip, not yet obtained, against the battery terminal, thus activating the tube.

Condemned never to commit any questionable research to writing, Lucas had been forced to carry all the complicated formulae in his mind, achieving at last a receptivity that enabled him to see the equations as though they were written in white fire against a velvet backdrop.

He had two weeks to snatch from under Ellen Morrit's watchful eye a larger item than any yet taken, to get it past the search.

It was impossible.

Probably the best he could do was to commit his formulae to paper, to hide the paper with the incomplete device, to hope that the next person to inhabit the small white house would be able to carry it further.

He replaced the device, slid the panel shut, melted the wax with a match flame, rubbing it smooth with his thumbnail.

CHAPTER TWO

Mad Scientist

ARDEN FORRESTER, Director of Search, was a smallish lean man with a spare body, a corded neck and an expression of intent curiosity.

He walked, snapping his heels firmly against the corridor floor, conscious of the fit of his gray uniform, conscious of the weight of responsibility. He and the Chief of the Bureau of Improvement and the Resident Psychiatrist formed the committee to determine which five workers should be removed to make way for the new ones.

He thought of himself as a hard and vigorous man, full of snap. When he

used the word in his mind it had two syllables: Suh-NAP! The last syllable came out with a whipcrack. No nonsense from these workers!

He bunched his thin hard knuckles and straightened his shoulders, taking a salute from one of the young guards.

He turned sharply into the office of the Bureau Chief, clicked his heels and saluted. As always, he detested having to salute paunchy Dale Evan. Why, the man didn't even keep himself physically fit! How could you be mentally alert if you were smothered?

Sargo, the resident psychiatrist, sat near Evan. Evan acknowledged the salute with a slight motion of his pudgy hand, said, "Sit down, Arden. Sit down. We have to go over the list again. It's down to eight. I've had the monitors wait. You probably saw them in the hall."

Arden Forrester sat down, careful of the crease in his uniform pants. Evan handed him the list. He pursed his lips and read it. He took a pencil from his blouse pocket, made four neat checks beside four of the eight names.

He handed the list back. "Those are the ones who have attempted to smuggle forbidden items out of their labs. Those four must go. You men can pick any one you please out of the remaining four."

Dale Evan sighed. "I wish you had five on your list, Arden. Whom do you nominate, George?"

Sargo inspected the glowing end of his cigarette. "Lewisson or Bendas."

Evan said, "I had picked Bendas or Lucas."

"Then that settles it," Forrester said, getting to his feet. "My four and Bendas."

Irritation showed on Dale Evan's face. "Sit down, Forrester. We'll talk to the monitors. Go out and tell the other four to go. Then send in Lucas' monitor. I believe her name is Morrit."

Forrester looked approvingly at Ellen Morrit. It was the first time he had noticed her in street clothes. Her severe working hairdo had been released and the golden hair fell to shoulder length. It softened her face Her dress, pale aqua, brought out very interesting and very adequate lines. Arden Forrester decided that he would soon exercise his right of substituting personal for automatic search of any employee in the Bureau of Improvement. It would be very interesting.

"Peter Lucas, number four three, is being considered for electro-surgery, Miss Morrit. This is a confidential meeting. Your comments will not be made a matter of record. What is your opinion of this?"

Her voice was crisp. "Lucas has the typical instability of all technical employees."

"Have you noted any change lately?"

"No sir."

"Does he attempt to . . . convert you to his way of thinking?"

"No sir."

"Does he sneer at the established order?"

"No sir."

"Would you prefer another assignment?"

She paused. "I had not thought of it." She shrugged. "A new one might be more difficult, sir."

"That is all. On your way out send Miss Peckingham in, please."

ELLEN MORRIT walked slowly down the hall toward the monitor exit. She showed her stamped search card to the guard at the door and he released the door catch for her.

She was confused. Peter Lucas had so irritated her during the past month that a dozen times she had been on

the verge of reporting him to Dale Evan. In fact, she had told some of the other monitors that she was about to turn him in.

And yet when she had been called in to testify, even though the irritation was fresh in her mind, she had—why, she had deliberately lied!

It was unthinkable. All of the monitors had been carefully conditioned so that there was not the slightest chance of an emotional attachment between a worker and his monitor.

And yet she had lied!

She was walking slowly toward the bus stand. She stopped. She knew why she had lied: because she wanted to spend the rest of her time in the Bureau of Improvement in the same room with Peter Lucas.

The obvious thing to do was to report for new conditioning. No! To do that would be to create the suspicion that she had lied to Evan.

Ellen knew that it was atavistic to think of a technical worker with anything except loathing. Mr. Evan and Captain Forrester and Mr. Sargo were sensible men doing a sensible job. It was evident that the burden of administration could be made easier by eliminating the most volatile workers each year. It was equally evident that Peter Lucas should be eliminated.

Yet when she thought of the soulless faces she had seen, the faces of the laborers, and thought of Lucas looking like that—something twisted her heart.

PETER LUCAS paused in the cool morning light and looked up at the building which housed Automatic Search. The guard pushed him roughly and said, "Stop dreaming, you."



In the first locker room he stripped, put his clothes in his locker, glanced at the narrow doorway. The laconic guard, as he stepped up, turned the dial to Lucas' number. Peter Lucas stepped into the shallow area.

His weight, size, allowable metal in the form of tooth fillings, ring and wristwatch, matched the settings on the machine. A low musical note sounded and he was free to enter the further locker room where he put on Bureau uniform. As he strapped on his sandals he wondered how on earth he would get the necessary battery through that doorway.

Tonight he would leave the removable filling in the lab, come through Search with a tiny strip of hard copper in his mouth, come back through the next morning with a useless bit of metal he would throw away as soon as he was in his lab. That was simple enough. It was the battery that had been baffling him for eleven months.

It was too large to project it into the fenced passage, as he had done with the tiny tube. No one could be trusted to risk throwing it to him through the narrow doorway in Search, even if he could have caught it without the guard's noticing.

Captain Forrester gave him a sardonic look as he passed into the main building. He wondered idly how many times he had considered the incredible satisfaction to be gained by striking the Director of Search with a clenched fist.

He knew the schedule of work ahead. Today he would get his hands on a good battery: compact and powerful, an inch and a quarter by an inch by three quarters of an inch. He could conceal it in his hand, get it down to the locker room, snap it onto the spring clip he had fashioned on the underside of the thin metal shelf.

But what then?

The lab door was open. Morrit, as usual, was waiting for him. He noticed absently that she looked as though she'd had a rough night. That didn't seem in character.

"Have a spirited evening, Morrit?"

"I was unable to sleep," she said primly. Her eyes were shadowed. She indicated a package on his desk. "Police broadcasting unit. Portable. The statistical section reports that fifteen percent of them get a blurred tone after three months' use."

He forced himself to yawn. Here was the battery, and it would be a good one.

ELLEN MORRIT watched him carefully throughout the day. She had come to a difficult decision just before dawn. She would watch Lucas with great care, and she would report him immediately if he stepped out of line; but not until then.

He had finished the analysis of the small broadcasting unit, finding that the ultra-short waves had magnetized the little screws that held the edge of the speaker diaphram. The recommendation was that the screws in future models be made of non-ferrous alloy.

He swept the dismantled parts into the waste bin, put the two magnetized screws and the revised bill of materials into the familiar envelope, and stood up.

She saw him start toward the door, heard him say, "See you tomorrow, jinx." Something was wrong but she didn't know quite what it was.

"Just a minute!" she snapped.

He stopped, turned slowly. There was something strained about his smile.

She walked to him and said, "Something is wrong, Mr. Lucas. You are

holding your hand in an odd way."

She reached out quickly and took his wrist. He let her open his hand. The small battery, emblem of guilt, lay on his broad palm.

The door was still closed. She saw how wrong she had been to lie, to defend him by misdirection. "I am going to—" She could not finish the sentence. His face was frighteningly close to hers, and his hand had closed on her throat.

He forced her roughly back against the wall. His eyes were quite mad. There was a muted drumming in her ears and the room swam with mist while she strained her lungs to drag air past her closed throat.

Even as consciousness faded, she knew that he would be caught in whatever evil plan he was carrying out.

His face loomed impossibly large, impossibly close. Other monitors had been killed in the past. They were essentially unstable, these technical workers. But a diagnosis was of small comfort now.

Then suprisingly his fingers left her throat. She gagged and coughed and the tears ran down her cheeks. He stood looking at her in a queer way. His voice was husky as he said, "Morrit, I think I could have gotten away with it. What happens when you hate somebody and can't kill them? When you don't want to kill them. When you even want to—" He forced her back against the wall once more and kissed her roughly.

She gasped and her cheeks flamed. She struck him across the mouth and slid away from him. "Mr. Lucas, I am taking this evidence immediately to the office of—"

She stopped and they both turned at the click of the door latch. Miss Glaydeen, Director of Monitors, walked in, her cheeks jiggling, her heavy steps rattling apparatus across the room on the zinc work table.

Her eyes had a look of mockery. She stopped three paces from Ellen Morrit and said, "I was going to send you the message, Morrit, but then I thought I'd come and take another look at you and see if I'd missed any hidden talent."

"What do you mean?" Ellen Morrit asked.

"You are honored, my dear. The Director of Search, Captain Forrester, has just indicated to me his desire to conduct a personal rather than a mechanical search of you tonight. Very flattering. And don't object. He has the right, you know."

"But I—"

"Report to Room C, my dear. I believe the good Captain is already there, impatiently waiting."

Miss Glaydeen smiled, turned on her heel and walked heavily out. The door slammed behind her.

Ellen Morrit had a feeling of nightmare. She took two steps closer to Peter Lucas and said, "Is—isn't there any way to—"

"Not in the manual there isn't," he said. She was surprised to see that he had a troubled look.

The world had gone upside down. A man who should have killed her had kissed her instead. She had lied to her superiors. And now Captain Forrester planned some unknown and unthinkable thing. Her loyalties were torn and confused.

"You must want this badly," she said, holding out the battery.

"Very badly," he admitted. He coughed. "If you took the battery right to Uncle Evan maybe you could throw a smoke-screen over the whole thing."

She realized that he was offering her the only out, an impossibly quixotic

sacrifice of himself to save her humiliation.

She left the office with the battery in her hand. She went directly to Room C, opened the door quietly, shut it behind her.

LUCAS waited for them to come for him. But they didn't.

He found the strip of copper he wanted, walked slowly down to the locker room. He was late; most of the others had gone. The guard told him to hurry it up. He went through Search, dressed again with a slowness that infuriated the guard and walked slowly down the fenced corridor.

Only one other worker was with him. The guard was surly. Lucas turned and saw the girl coming across the grass to the corridor fence. He saw her hair, gold in the twilight.

"Get away from the fence, you!" the guard roared.

"I am a monitor," the girl said firmly. Lucas recognized her voice, stared almost with disbelief at Morrit. It was the first time he had ever seen her in street clothes, seen her with the hair that fell to shoulders that were straight and perfect.

"Come here, guard!" she ordered.

The guard turned to them. "You two stand where you are." He went to the fence.

Lucas looked at her and saw the new hardness of her face, a bitter curve of mouth, an angry look in her eyes.

"Guard," she said, "you are to search the clothes of that tall one there. Lucas. An item was smuggled through Search."

As the guard turned toward him, Lucas caught the pleading look in her eyes. He was thoroughly confused. She was trying to tell him something.

The other worker looked on without much interest. Lucas held his arms up and the guard went through every pocket with care. Lucas stopped breathing as he saw Morrit back away from the fence, saw the small object in her hand.

She swung her arm as though practicing. With narrowed eyes she watched the guard. The search over, the guard turned back toward Morrit. In the instant of his turning, she threw the battery over the high fence.

By the time the guard had turned completely, her arms were back at her sides.

Lucas saw it against the darkening sky. He took two quick steps to one side and it splatted into the palm of his hand. He dropped it into his pocket.

"Nothing on him, Miss," the guard mumbled.

The other worker had seen the exchange. Lucas faced him tensely. He saw the fleeting grin, saw the other worker form the unspoken words, "Nice going!"

"Sorry to have troubled you," Morrit said. She called to Lucas, "I will not be reporting tomorrow, Mr. Lucas."

The words meant nothing to him; not until he had shut the door of the small white house behind him.

Morrit was not reporting. Under the stringent rules, no monitor could give up her position until the full five years had been served. To refuse to report would create the suspicion that the monitor had somehow become infected with the creative psychosis of the technical workers. And it was a free ticket to the little gray amphitheater where they wielded the electric scalpel.

Something had cracked Ellen Morrit. Something had made her betray the regime. And she would have to become a fugitive. He could not see her waiting for them to come and get her.

Thus her words became a message. She had said, "You are right, Peter, and I have been wrong. Maybe this battery will help you become free. If so, I will be in the dead city."

And suddenly he knew there had been only one way for her to get the battery past Captain Arden Forrester. Acquiescence. A very high price to pay; and a very impetuous decision to make.

His smile was a grimace that pressed his lips back against his teeth. Lucas had made a convert to heresy, had added another prisoner to the world.

He ate slowly, stretched out on the bed. His hand touched the wall, and he sat up in sudden panic. The wax was cracked. At last they had found the hiding place.

He pulled the sliding panel down, reached inside. His hand touched the device. He took it out and inspected it. They had not removed it, had seen that it was an odd thing, too small to be dangerous—possibly a physical indication that the mind of Peter Lucas was failing. And it had been left behind as evidence.

He forced steadiness into his hands, unscrewed the battery frame, put the little battery in place, connected one wire to a terminal, the other to the copper strip.

They arrived at that moment: Arden Forrester and two of the guards. Forrester swaggered in, his thumbs tucked under his uniform belt.

"Mr. Lucas, I believe. And what toy do you have there, Mr. Lucas? An automatic toothbrush, no doubt. And where did you get the metal, Mr. Lucas?"

Peter Lucas grinned foolishly at Forrester. He made his mouth slack, shifted the device into his right hand,

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the battery case against the heel of his hand.

"We'd better go see Mr. Evan," Forrester said. He winked broadly at Lucas. "A shame to take you out of that lab of yours where the decorations are so nice. So very, very nice."

Lucas depressed the copper strip so that it made contact with the bare terminal. The tube glowed for a moment in the lead socket.

Forrester stood spare, firm and erect.

Lucas knew that the device had failed. And then he saw Forrester's right hand. Slowly it lost form. It sagged, sluggishly, a pink wax hand held above a flame, the fingers merging.

Forrester's eyes bulged and he shouted. He snatched his hand away from the waistband of his trousers. The hand pulled free at the wrist, spun across the room and slapped viscidly against the wall, clinging for a moment, all shape lost, bleeding in a thin line on the plaster, sliding slowly down the pattern of blood.

A gout of blood came from the wrist and where it struck the focal point of the device, it turned into a pinkish fog. The blouse where the hand had been turned shiny and ran into liquid.

The beam hit into the spare body underneath, softening it to a thin liquid, exploding it into a pink mist. Forrester screamed once as he fell.

A guard leveled his automatic and Lucas managed to center the beam on it. The barrel sagged as the man tried to fire it. The unliquified portion exploded violently, and the man, his face torn open, fell and writhed on the floor. The other guard tried to make the door, but Lucas swept the beam across his legs at knee level. The man dropped and at first Lucas thought that he had dropped onto his knees. Then he saw that the man's legs were out in front of him, toes up. The guard made a mewling sound, fell back, swiveling the gun to fire at Lucas. Lucas swept the beam across his face, saw the face become a pinkish pool in which the eyes were but widening stains.

He touched the guard whose gun had exploded on the back of the neck and the man was suddenly still.

Breathing hard, Lucas stood erect. He knew that if he looked at them any more he'd be violently ill.

He listened. The subdued workers who had heard the shot stayed close to their houses.

He heard the distant pound of running feet. There was no time to liberate the others. He cut the back wall of the house, finding that at fifteen feet, the area of liquification was about six inches in diameter. He made a sweeping cut, seeing the running plastic explode into gas with a puffing sound.

The section fell out and he went through. As he went he brushed the moist edge by accident with the back of his hand. For a moment he was in panic for fear the liquid contagion could be transmitted by contact.

But the back of his hand was uninjured. As fear faded, he noted that the process did not generate heat.

Floodlights clicked on over the area, and the massive throat of the siren on the roof of the Bureau Building began to pulsate.

Lucas felt naked, crouching in the glow, fifty feet from the rear of his house. Someone shouted behind him and he ran for the fence.

There was a soft whisper near his ear and the slug continued on to smash against the wire mesh. With a slow up and down sweep he cut the fence, seeing the dance of blue sparks as the electric current tried to bridge the gap.

He flattened, turned around and swept the beam across the legs of those who pounded toward him. The hoarse shouts turned to screams as they toppled over. Another slug whispered too close to him, and he sprayed the convulsing bodies until at last they were still. Another splash, and a section of the fence fell away.

He ran through the gap, turned and aimed the beam at the nearest floodlight. It spat and went dark.

There was a quarter mile of open ground to cross. He had covered half of it at full run when the headlights bounced toward him. Silhouetted against the distant floodlights he could see the men who clung to the outside of the car.

He dropped and rolled into a shallow place, propped himself on his elbows.

"Spread out and nail him!" somebody ordered.

Lucas yelled, "Go back! Go back or you'll die!"

"He's right over there. Try a few shots with the rifle, Joe."

He couldn't risk rifle fire. He pushed the copper strip against the terminal, sprayed the beam back and forth across the vehicle like a man watering a lawn. One headlight popped out and a bubbling scream was cut off.

There were cries of alarm. The other headlight went out and he heard the car creak and sag oddly.

A man came frighteningly close, leaping toward him. Lucas aimed up at him, threw himself to one side. The man fell across his legs, writhed once and was still. Something warm ran across Lucas' ankle. There was no more movement. He pulled himself clear, staggered to his feet and began to run again.

By the time he reached the wide avenue, he heard the rising bleat of sirens all over the city.

He crossed to parallel streets, crouched behind a hedge and waited there until his breathing was under control. A hundred feet away a man hurried toward his car.

Lucas ran after him. The man heard the faint sound and turned.

"Give me your keys," Lucas demanded.

The man grunted as he swung. The snap of the beam caught the fist in midair. It hit Lucas along the jaw, a soft and boneless thing. He wiped his face on his sleeve, bent over the man and found the car keys.

He knew of an automobile only through the drawings he had seen and the descriptions he had read.

He carefully placed the device on the seat beside him, started the car and drove it jerkily down the street, cutting the first corner too closely so that the rear wheel hit the curbing and he bounced high.

Five blocks, ten, twenty.

He abandoned the car, ran down toward the fire lane, the scattered rubble that marked the border of the dead city.

There were no lights there. He could not risk falling.

Behind him the sirens moaned and he knew that all of the resources of the New City, even of the country and the world would be directed at finding him and killing him. He was the villain of the melodrama now; he was mad, evil science raising its foul head again, greedy for destruction.

CHAPTER THREE

City of Pariahs

IN THE dead city ten thousands lived where once there had been four millions. They lived outside the frame of reference of the New City,

lived as their remote forebears had lived, in lust and violence and sudden death.

Some of them were there because to venture outside was to die for some past crime. Others were there because their emotional quotients were dangerous to the orderliness of the New City. And many had been born there, amid the clutter of gray stone, of broken brick, of dust and decay and matted, tangled growth that obscured first-floor windows, split the battered asphalt.

At night, in an area ten blocks deep bordering on the dead city, doors were double-barred and windows were shuttered. In time that area would become part of the dead city, providing new loot, new hiding places.

Within the dead city there was a loose society, with the strongest man at the top. Most vagrants who wandered in had a short life. If they managed to survive attack, they would still have no hiding place and would be picked up by the well-armed groups of special police who made periodic patrols through the man-made wilderness.

The police had learned by listening to the whisper of a thrown knife, that it was wise to make the patrols at regular and predictable intervals during daylight, to stay together, to conduct only the most cursory searches of buildings.

Ellen Morrit crept into the dead city at night.

She knew the unforgettable extent of her humiliation, the pathetic inadequacy of her revenge against a society which had abused and disillusioned her.

It would have been simpler to wait for them to come. But to sit and wait meant to think and to remember. It was easier to run away.

She carried a hand torch and a .22 target pistol. She wore rough tweeds and stout shoes and carried food in a hiking pack.

She turned and looked back at the New City, at the blare of lights which stopped abruptly at the high mound of rubble which she had crossed.

Ellen Morrit did not know that the first rule of secret travel by night is never to silhouette oneself against distant lights.

But her body was young, her reactions quick, and she carried the automatic ready to fire.

She whirled as one stone clicked against another and she made out the figure running toward her, crouched, knuckles almost touching the littered ground. In alarm rather than through any desire to kill she tugged on the trigger. The weapon made a brittle crackling sound and the figure fell, rolled almost to her feet.

She stood still for a long time, then risked shining the small flash on it. It was a man with a tangle of dark beard. His open eyes looked up at the distant stars and his mouth was open. She saw, in the hollow of his throat, the pool of blood where the tiny slug had gone in.

She clicked out the light, backed away, sank to her knees and began to weep.

In the end she decided to leave the dead city, to try to find a hiding place among less alien people.

She stood up with resolution, and turned directly into the arms of a man who towered over her.

He tore the gun out of her hand and when she screamed he clapped a harsh hand over her mouth. Her teeth met in his flesh and he cursed softly. The world exploded around her in darting fire and she was dimly conscious of being lifted off her feet.

She fought her way up out of untold depths to a consciousness of hard stone against her hips and shoulders. Damp stone. When she opened her eyes the flicker of oil lamps threw needles deep into her throbbing brain.

It was a long room, damp and windowless, and she knew it was far underground.

Her eyes slowly adjusted and she saw that there were four men at a crude table, another one on a bench against the far wall. A ragged girl with a white broken face leaned against the wall near the man who sat on the bench. She sang in a low, harsh voice, accompanying herself on a small stringed instrument. She stared at Ellen Morrit and her eyes were vacant and dead.

A much older woman squatted ten feet away, spooning a dark substance out of a rusty tin, smacking withered lips with each mouthful.

The men were rough, ragged, bearded and noisy. There was a lamp on the table, and several bottles and a greasy deck of cards.

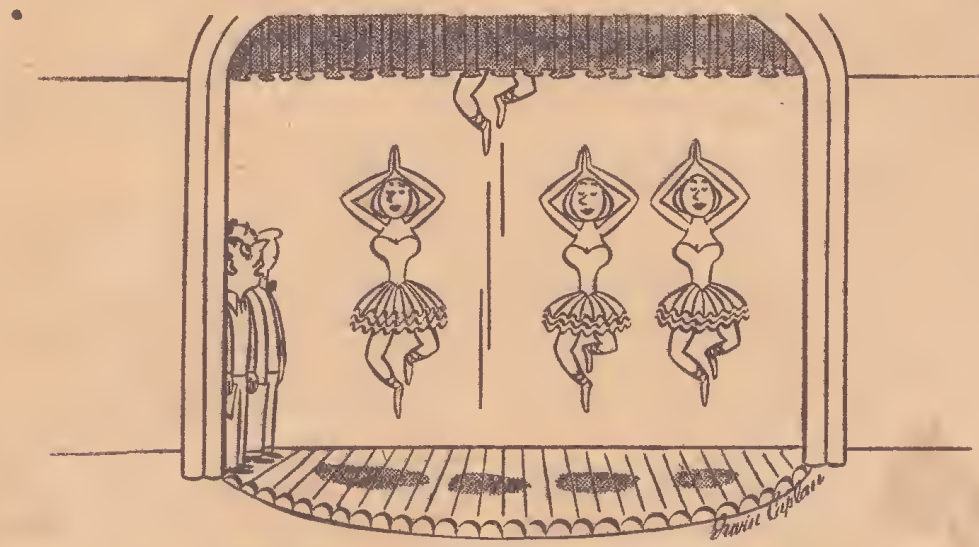
One of them looked toward her, threw his cards down, got up and swaggered over. "Awake, eh? Come and meet the people."

He grabbed her wrist, pulled her to her feet, steadied her when she would have fallen.

He held her in his big arm, turned to the others and said loudly, "Now who calls James unlucky? A gun and a girl, all in the same night."

The old woman cackled. "When Thomas finds out maybe he'll let you keep the gun."

The man spat on the floor. "Now there's reason for standing up to Thomas, woman." He took Ellen roughly by the shoulders and spun her completely around. "Look at her! Meat on her bones. Soft hands. None of your leather-faced women, aye Janey?"



"We'd better tell Pavloma to take it a little easier with her Wheaties!"

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The dark girl cursed him, without bitterness.

James chuckled and pinched Ellen's cheek. "Ah, you're a great rarity here in the dead city, girl. We get the murderous ones, and the ones that have lived hard. None like you. Not for a long time."

"Take me to Thomas," Ellen said, trying to make her voice strong.

He scowled. "What would you know of Thomas?"

She lifted her chin. In this case she would try to forsake the devil she knew for the devil she didn't. "He expects me."

James shook his head dolefully from side to side. "Now just think of that! Thomas just upped and told you to come on in here and find him, did he?"

He pushed her back toward the corner, walked to the table and pulled a slight man up off his chair. "Bobby, you run along over and see Thomas and tell him that he has a lady friend waiting here for him. Be quick, boy!"

Bobby gave Ellen a quick, frightened look and left. The old woman threw the tin aside. It rolled across the floor, spewing out the remainder of its contents. She scuttled out into the night.

Ellen stayed where she was. The rest of them moved, by unspoken consent, down to the far end of the big room. James took from his belt a gun she recognized as her own. He slid out the clip and checked the shells, snapped it back in.

He then flattened himself against the wall beside the arched doorway. Through the doorway Ellen could see damp stairs leading up.

PETER LUCAS went deeper into the dead city. He knew that before the night was over the patrols would be out. The car would be found. They would be coming in after him. There might not be much time. It was important to locate someone who knew the terrain.

Coarse growth grew so high as to brush his face. He tried to force his way into it, and had to retrace his steps. His eyes were getting used to the starlight. He could make out the dim outlines of the buildings.

A stone rattled and someone ran off into the distance. He shouted after the sound, his voice startlingly loud in the silence. There was no answer.

He started violently as the shot sounded. It was near at hand. Very near. And yet it had an odd, hollow, booming quality.

He moved in what he thought was the right direction. Ten feet, twenty feet. Another shot came and another. He turned to the right and his outstretched hand touched a rough wall. He moved along the wall and saw a glow of light, a low arched doorway, half filled with rubble. He scrambled in. The light was stronger.

He went cautiously down the wide flight of stone stairs to a landing. The stairs cut back. He went down the second flight.

The stairs went through an arched doorway and into a room with a stone floor. He could see the huge stones of the floor, the mortar between them. The light was dim and it flickered. Oil lamps, he thought. Primitive.

A rough voice spoke words that he didn't understand. He stood in indecision, the device aimed and ready.

There was the sound of a heavy blow, a low moan of pain. Lucas decided that whoever was in the room was too busy to notice him. He moved quickly down the rest of the stairs, passed through the arch and moved to one side, his shoulders against the stone wall.

A dark girl sang and looked at him with dull interest. Bearded men in a far end of the long room turned and stared, wary and taut in their attitudes.

But a vast, pale, clean-shaven man with hands like hams and a massive belly merely looked up at him and said, "Be ,with you in a moment, friend."

A husky man lay on the floor. His eyes were agonized. A few feet away lay a .22 pistol with a long barrel. As the huge man bent over the figure on the floor, Lucas saw the raw, bloody streak straight across the back of his bull neck.

The big man pulled the prostrate man to his feet, steadied him and smashed him full in the face with a huge right fist. The man fell heavily and the big man kicked him in the side with all his strength, sliding him several feet along the stone floor.

Grunting, the big man picked up the automatic, grinned again at Lucas and said, "The fool tried to kill me. Something about a woman." He giggled, a curiously womanish sound. "He was going to drill me through the head as I came in, but I came in too fast. Always come into a room fast, boy, or don't come in at all. Who are you?"

Lucas noted that though the man held the automatic negligently, the thin barrel was pointed at Lucas' middle.

With a small warm sound, Ellen Morrit came from the far corner, ran hard against Lucas' chest, her body shaking, her eyes panic-stricken.

"Yours, eh?" the big man said. "I'm boss man around here. I may make you prove you can hang onto her. Who are you?"

"Lucas. I escaped tonight from the Bureau of Improvement."

There was an angry muttering from the men at the end of the room. The girl stopped her drab and monotonous song and merely stared.

The big man said, "We don't want your sort here."

Not even here, Peter thought. Not even in the dead city. When they can feel superior to no one else on earth, they still have contempt for us.

"Move away from him, girl," the big man said. "No need to hurt you too."

But Ellen clung more tightly to Peter Lucas.

He depressed the copper strip against the terminal.

The big man was very close to him, reaching for Ellen.

The beam touched the joint of the massive elbow and the forearm dangled limply. The big man did not cry out. Peter swept the beam across the middle of him. The heavy shirt parted and thick drops hung from the parted edge. The white flesh quivered and slid and puffs of gas made a rancid stench. When the beam touched the other elbow, the gun clattered to the stone floor.

Where the puffs of pinkish gas had erupted, Peter could see into the man, see a gleam of rib, the veined substance of a lung, see an edge of the strong heart, throbbing steadily.

The big man's mouth twisted into a smile. He said, "It looks like you might be the new—"

His eyes glazed and he went down as suddenly as though his feet had been kicked out from under him.

Peter turned in time to see the flickering silver of a thrown knife. He moved violently away from it, swept it with the beam and it continued to splash against the inside of the stone arch, to run in silver drops to the damp floor.

The girl who sang began to laugh.

She stood with her throat taut, her face uplifted, her mouth a down-curved slit. The sound stopped. They went out into the night.

Peter aimed the device at the others. They lifted their hands. He made a small gesture and they followed the first two. The unconscious man on the floor was the only one left, the only one left who was alive.

Peter dragged him to the stairs, pulled him up a dozen stairs to the landing. He left him there.

"Get back," he said. They went down again, across from the staircase. He used the beam to cut a half circle over the arch. He cut it again and again until he heard the shift of stone. The stone crashed down, choking the staircase, blocking the exit, blowing out the wicks of the oil lamps.

They found the lamps and lighted them and put them on the wooden table. The rock had covered the body of Thomas.

They sat at the table and they looked into each other's eyes and there was no need for words, for explanations, for empty sounds. Everything that could be said was said, and when he covered her hand with his it was a pledge and a dedication stronger than anything that had happened in their lives.

They sat alone in a stone room under the dead city and it was very clear to both of them that what little remained of life would have meaning and purpose and beauty.

CHAPTER FOUR

No Exit

LUCAS awoke. The air was stale and the room had a darkness so intense that he felt as though he were in an ancient tomb.

He wondered what had awakened him. He listened. He heard it again, a distant thud which sent vibrations through the stone of the floor.

He found Ellen's flash, squinted at the intense beam. Her face, a fragile oval faintly lighted by the reflection, was like the face of a sleeping child.

He touched her shoulder and she made a warm sound, a soft murmur deep in her throat. Out of the depths of sleep she had awakened with his name on her lips.

Then the fear came. He lit the lamp that was near them. Her mouth was tight and she pushed a strand of the golden hair away from her forehead with the back of her hand.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"Blasting, I think. They know we're down here. I shouldn't have let those others go. They were caught and made to talk."

The thud was louder and more rock fell from above the place where the doorway had been, dust sifting down to drift in winking motes in the flashlight beam.

"What will we do?" she said, and he could hear the quaver in her voice.

"We're two flights below ground level, Ellen. We can cut our way out with this gimmick, if the ground is solid enough so that the tunnel won't collapse."

They stood up and she clung to him, touched his throat with her lips.

He said, "You should have had a nice meek worker to supervise, darling. And then after your five years you could have—"

She stopped his lips with her fingertips. "Shh, Lucas. This way is better, no matter what happens."

With the next resounding crash, they could clearly hear the outside debris falling back to earth. He turned, focused the small device on the wall

opposite where the doorway had been, the flashlight in his left hand.

The stone ran fluidly and puffed into gas. He made the cut large, and, as he had expected, a large section of the wall collapsed. When the dust of fracture cleared away, he saw that it was possible to climb over the rubble to the face of the dark earth beyond.

He held her arm as they clambered up, ducking low to get through the wide low space. He focused the device on the earth from short range. The earth melted into a liquid and ran back toward the rocks and the gases choked them.

He found that he could eliminate much of the gas by using the device in intermittent bursts, giving the liquified earth time to run down.

He angled the tunnel up at a forty-five degree slant. Once, as they were about to move into a new portion of the tunnel, the roof collapsed, a large clod striking him heavily in the shoulder, forcing him to his knees. But instinctively he had shielded the tiny device in his hand.

He estimated that in cutting up through twenty feet at a forty-five degree angle the tunnel would have to be nearly thirty feet in length and he counted his paces as he followed the cut of the beam.

When he heard a distant shout from behind, he turned and undercut the ceiling of the shaft so that it fell, blocking the tunnel.

Ellen was subdued and, he thought, remarkably well under control.

When he estimated that the distance was right, he focused the beam almost straight up, pulling the device out of the way of the liquid, then holding the flashlight in its place and looking up.

He saw a circular area no bigger than his fist where dim light seemed to filter in. He cut the tunnel rapidly ahead, recklessly allowing the liquid to run over his feet and ankles.

He made a hole up into the daylight, cut a notch for his feet, stepped up and cautiously looked out. It was dawn in the dead city, the air sharp with ozone, the sun disc edging over the far hill that was sawtoothed with the minaretted buildings of the New City.

In the distance, beyond the corner of the building they had left he could see two men standing, not looking in his direction. Fifty feet away was a jumble of small buildings falling into

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decay, a tangled confusion which might mean safety.

Leaning down, he said to Ellen, "This has got to be fast. I'll jump up, pull you up and then run as fast as you can with me toward the right."

She nodded, her eyes wide.

He wiggled up out of the hole and, as she came up onto the step, he reached down, got her wrist and pulled her up.

He heard the shouts, and his throat tightened with fear. As she got her feet under her, he saw that another group had come from the other direction and they were cut off from the tangle of buildings.

They came toward him at a dead run. No shots were fired. With deadly certainty he cut them down. More appeared. They wore the police uniform. He could see that they were hesitant and frightened, but they came on.

As they reached the place where the others had fallen, he cut them down, feeling a sting of nausea in his throat.

From the other direction came a running group, at least fifteen men from the guard details of the Bureau and the World Administration Building.

They ran silently, but in a matter of moments they lay on the ground, calling out with fear and pain and surprise.

One of them had come within ten feet of them. He lay on his side, his clenched fists held to his mouth, and he cried like a child.

Whoever was in charge had thrown a cordon around the area and from every direction more of them approached.

Peter Lucas was sick of death and pain. They were not shooting. They wanted him alive. His hand shook as the weapon bit a piece out of the advancing circle. He wished that they would shoot. Anything but this stupid and futile advance into dissolution.

His hand was shaking and he realized that he could not kill many more. He knew that he could take but a few more lives before the pity in him stopped his hand.

And as he lifted the weapon Ellen clung to his arm and said, "No. No more, Peter. Not any more!"

And he knew that she felt as he did. In the moment before they rushed, gaining courage from his lowering of the silent, deadly weapon, he smiled down at her and whispered, "Good-by, Ellen."

They hit him in a concerted rush, and he spun, fell, tried to roll with the device under him so that he could grind it into a nothingness which no man could decipher.

His wrist was caught and his face was ground into the rocks. His hand was pulled up into the small of his back until he could no longer hold it shut.

His wrists were handcuffed behind him and he was dragged roughly to his feet. They held him and one of them, a young guard, was crying. He looked at the men who moaned and moved useless limbs, and he hit Lucas in the face with all his strength.

Lucas could not fall. Another group surrounded Ellen. A purplish bruise was forming on her cheek, but she held her head high.

The man in charge wore guard's gray, insignia of captain's rank on one shoulder, the interlocked WA of World Administration on the other. He had a cold, competent look, entirely unlike the red, surly anger of the police official who walked beside him.

The captain said, "These two will be taken immediately to the trucks. And they will not be beaten or injured

in any way whatever. Is that clear?"

The men nodded. The young guard said, "Let me get one more smack at him. My brother is over there with—"

"Silence!" the captain snapped. "Take them to the trucks."

ELLEN and Peter were forced to lie down on the bed of the truck. The guards kept the mob back. There was hate in the shrill jeers and boos of the citizens.

Lucas shuddered as he heard the animal sound of those massed voices. If they should get their hands on Ellen . . .

Someone yelled above the crowd noise, "Roll it. Full speed."

The trucks roared and jounced. A heavy stone arched into the truck, bounced off the bed and rebounded to cut a gash across the back of a guard's hand. He cursed and sucked the the wound, clinging tightly with his other hand.

The truck made a wild turn and Lucas was skidded over against Ellen. His fingertips touched her arm and he exerted a gentle pressure. The angry noises faded behind them.

Above them the gray of the morning sky had changed to a clear, deep blue. Lucas looked up at it, at two drifting puffs of white cloud. Though he saw everything with the abnormal clarity of a man who is already dead, he felt peace within him. He felt a stolid disregard for what might happen, and he thought that there would be further rebellion, further defiance by the technical workers. And one day one of them would succeed in taking over enormous power. Then the earth could forsake this barren plateau of static mediocrity, could once again reach toward the stars.

The truck ground to a halt, and he heard the procedure of identification. It started again, winding up a graveled road. The truck went through an arched entrance that cut off the sky with the suddenness of a blow.

When it stopped, Lucas' ankles were seized and he was pulled back out of the bed of the truck. To the left was an open door. He was herded through the door so rapidly that he had no chance to look back at Ellen.

Two men were with him, one of them the captain. Ahead were three elevators. He was pushed roughly into the middle one. The door was silently shut and it went up with an acceleration that pressed his feet hard against the soft floor.

This was not what he had expected. Dale Evan should have been the responsible official, the one to decree electro-surgery; but he knew within seconds that they were not in the Bureau of Improvement Building. The insignia of the captain, plus the duration of the elevator trip, told him that they were in the World Administration Building.

He was pushed into a plain, windowless room about ten feet square. The glowing baseboard was the light source. He was carefully searched by the lower-ranking guard. The captain unlocked the handcuffs and the two of them left, closing the door, locking it.

In this soundproofed room, time had no meaning. He realized how close he was to the extreme limit of emotional exhaustion.

So his little escapade was a matter of a higher level than Bureau affairs. He smiled wryly as he thought of Dale Evan's discomfiture. The technical workers would have hard sledding for many months—provided the angry public didn't tear the place apart.

At last he stretched out on the hard floor, felt sleep rush over him like a dark tide.

ELLEN MORRIT was awakened by the unlocking of the door of her small, featureless room. The matron who had brought her to the room came in, put fresh clothes on the floor, stood aside while a second woman brought in a basin of water, various toilet articles.

"Fix yourself up," she said. "He doesn't like filth."

Alone, Ellen Morrit washed and dressed, and as she held the mirror she thought that she could shatter it against the floor, slash her wrists with the shards of glass. Yet the mystery, why it was necessary to be made beautiful in order to die, was a nagging question.

The dress provided was of a dark, rich fabric, a weave unfamiliar to her. It combined extreme thinness with warmth.

She was ready when they came for her. The matron carried a thin chain with a wooden handle on the end. She made two loops around Ellen's wrist and Ellen knew that a half turn of the handle would bring excruciating pain.

She was taken back to the elevator, and once again taken upward.

She gasped as the elevator door opened. One whole wall of the room was of glass, craftily curved so as to eliminate reflections. Far below stretched the entire expanse of the New City.

"Hello, Ellen," Peter Lucas said. She turned quickly, saw him seated in a deep chair of blonde wood. He wore clothes of the same dark fabric as hers. His arms were held flat to the arms of the chair by two wide, shining bands of metal that clamped them firmly.

The matron led her to the chair near his. Both chairs looked toward a raised dais, and beyond it were pale yellow draperies. When her arms were fastened, the matron left. The elevator door shut and they heard the tiny hum of power as it dropped.

She and Peter were alone in the room. It had an air of luxury and power, of quiet surroundings subordinated to a powerful personality.

She looked toward the bookshelves, noticed that the titles were of approved books. There was no clue to the owner of the room.

"What are we waiting for?" she asked.

His voice was harsh. "For the unforgettable pleasure of talking to Ryan, I believe. The Unit Advisor. This is high-level stuff."

"Why do they want to talk to us?"

"That should be obvious, Ellen. They have you taped as helping me. They will want to know our methods. If we don't talk freely, they'll have some pretty ways of making us talk."

A small table stood on the raised dais. On it was the device that had been taken from him. She wondered that they had not destroyed it.

Lucas said, "I wish you hadn't been brought into this, Ellen."

"After . . . after Forrester I couldn't feel any loyalty to them." She laughed. "He was so ridiculous. I let him think that he was flattering me. He was breathing so hard. When he had his arms around me I kicked him and I hit him in the mouth with my fist. I had the little battery in that hand. He fell and hit his head on the bench. I ran out to the locker room, through the other door, put on my street clothes and left. I didn't know what to do with the battery. Then I saw you with the guard. It—it just seemed like a way of getting even."

"And you aren't sorry?" Lucas asked softly.

"Not for anything, Peter." And she knew as she said it that it was the truth.

There was a rustle.

Peter Lucas frowned at the man who stepped briskly through the yellow draperies. They fell into place behind him. This wasn't Ryan.

This man had a clown's face. It looked as though someone had taken hold of the upper lip and given a sharp tug downward, and the face had frozen. The upper lip was pendulous, and all the lines of the face seemed drawn down toward it. The man was slight, obviously in his fifties. His small blue eyes were shrewd and quick.

He stepped down off the dais and walked over to them. He rubbed his palms together with a dry, whispering sound. smiled at them and said, "How do you do, Ellen. And you, Peter. I happen to be Emery Ladu, the Chairman."

Peter's mind spun dizzily and focused on a book of his childhood. Alice in Wonderland.

This was the man. This was the calloused dictator who, with the help of his advisors, kept the world on a dead level of mediocrity. Dictatorship from afar has a touch of the grandiose about it. Close up, Ladu was a brisk little man with sharp blue eyes, a clown's face and an air of trying hard to be charming.

In some odd way it made him more fearful.

Ladu wrinkled up his face. "This is why I never permit pictures," he said gaily. "Wouldn't want to frighten the public. It wouldn't inspire the requisite awe, if they should know what I look like. My, you are a silent couple, aren't you?"

"Whatever you want, get it over with and stop this cat-and-mousing around," Lucas growled.

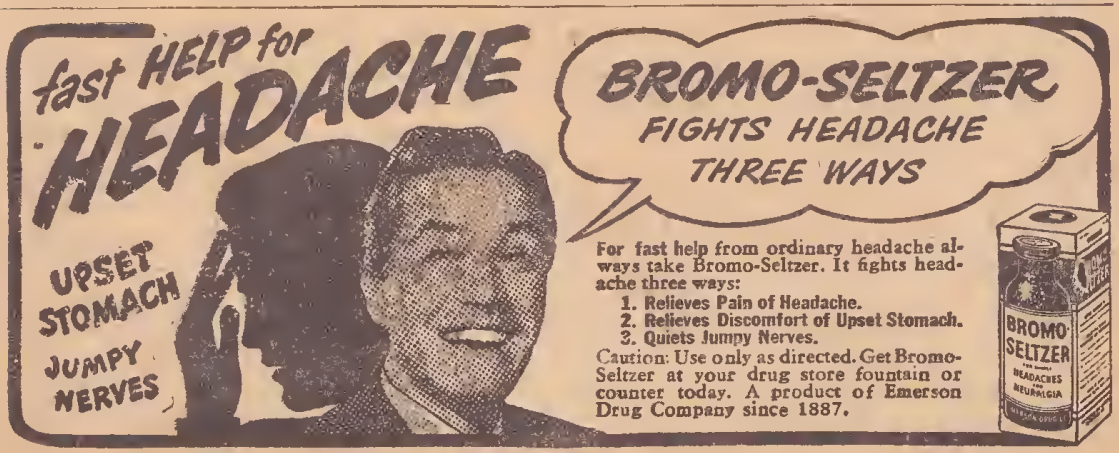
Ladu shrugged. "You see? Preconceived ideas. I can't be anything but horrible, can I? My, how you people must hate me!"

"Certainly I hate you," Lucas said. "You're the one who thinks more of your comfort and power than the future of the race. You're the one that can't see the slow death of the world around you."

Ladu pursed his lips, cocked his head on one side and stared at Lucas. Then he turned to Ellen and said, "Your friend illustrates the typical aberrations of the second-class mind."

"What do you mean, second-class!" Lucas said loudly. Ladu had touched the focal point of pride, the pride in intellect that had kept him integrated throughout the lonely years.

"Just what I said, my dear boy. Just what I said. The best examinations that could be devised proved you to have a second-class mind that would adjust to close confinement and regi-



mentation without losing a certain analytical and creative knack which is useful."

Ladu turned his back on them, went over and stepped up on the dais and took the device from the table. "This," he said, "I find to be very interesting. And for more than one reason. The achievement indicates that under close confinement you, probably through emotional stress, became a superior sort of second-class mind."

"I resent your continual use of that word," Lucas said. He managed to sneer. "You, I suppose, have a first-class mind?"

Ladu raised one eyebrow. "As a matter of fact, I have. But my talents are in a political and sociological direction."

"Why are we here?" Ellen asked, her gray eyes narrowed.

"You are here because you constitute a new type of problem. Oh, we've had trouble over in the Bureau before. I get the reports. I seldom read them. Poor fat old Evan worries so much about his tremendous responsibilities."

"New in what way?" Lucas asked, impatiently.

"Other devices have been manufactured in there, you know. Escape devices. Or merely little tools to express a vast resentment toward the established order. But nothing of any originality. Such as this." He waved the device, replaced it on the table and came back to stand in front of them. He was frowning.

"Originality is supposed to be the ultimate sin in your neat little world, isn't it?" Lucas asked.

Emery Ladu waved a hand toward the curved glass through which could be seen all of the New City. "To all the people out there it is the ultimate sin. But not to me."

"You have the power. Why don't you propagandize them? Why don't you root out all this fantastic fear of progress?"

"There, my boy, is where a first-class mind can give you an answer. Because the administration of a static society is far easier than the administration of one where progress in one part of the world or another will give specific areas a temporary advantage. Temporary advantages lead to conflict, first on the economic and then on the military level. It is too difficult to cope with those potential focal points of disorder—and disaster."

"Then, as I said before, you think only of your comfort and your position, and not of mankind."

Ladu smiled sadly at Ellen. "You see how emotional the second-class mind can get?"

Before she could answer he walked away a few feet. When he turned he had a large gold coin in his hand. He showed it to them, enclosed it in his palm, waved his hand around a few times, then opened it. The coin was gone.

Lucas snorted. "A first-class childish trick."

"Be still!" Ladu said. The good humor was gone from his voice. Suddenly he was a very impressive person, ruthlessness surprisingly visible in his face and attitude. The clown's face was no longer funny.

"With a child you must use the explanations a child can follow," he said. "Neither of you knows what happened to that coin. Why? Because you were following the motion of my hand. It drew your eye because it was in motion."

He held up the same hand, fist clenched. "This hand, you fool, represents the Bureau of Improvement. It is in motion. It is visible. It attracts the mind of the people. Forbidden

talent under careful control. 'Aha,' they say. 'Old Ladu will keep them under his thumb. Ladu feels as we do. Together we will protect ourselves.' But Ladu knows, and they don't, that the poor ineffectual Bureau of Improvement is staffed with second-class minds inside people with a high stability quotient."

He began to pace back and forth. "You, Lucas, try to tell me—me—that time is short, that the earth grows barren, that nature weeds us out through the diminishing vigor of reproduction."

He stopped in front of Lucas, leaned over and his voice dropped to a whisper. "Lucas, how much time would we have if we spent most of it trying to destroy the superstitious fear that was imbedded in the race by a hundred mushroom clouds of smoke? How much time would be left?"

Under the naked force of the man's mind, Lucas shook his head stupidly. "What are you getting at?" he asked.

Ladu laughed. "I throw them a bone. I give them a gesture to watch. Here, my people, is the Bureau of Improvement. Yes, we are very progressive. We will let them do a little work for us—but carefully controlled, you understand."

Ellen, her voice shaking, said, "Your hand was the Bureau. The coin was the first-class minds."

"Of course!" he said. "Of course! Poor Peter never stopped to think what happened to them. He was too shocked to find out that he was not an apex, a pinnacle."

The emotion faded out of his voice. He said soberly, "You have made a contribution, Lucas. You have earned yourself a promotion. I have been in contact with the personnel chief at the base."

Lucas shook his head, as though by doing so he could clear it. "Base?"

Ladu's smile was grim. "The place where we send the first-class minds where we have been sending them, my predecessor and I, for the past sixty years. A thousand million tons of steel and concrete laboratories in the Chin Hills of North Burma, a self-contained city of thousands where miles of jungle are seared by the blasts of the ships that have taken off in search of a new system which will support mankind." He laughed shortly. "The tribes of the jungles call it the place where the stars shoot upward."

"But—"

"Lucas, you try my patience. In fifty or a hundred years, the men who come after me will set up the machinery of colonization. The strongest and the healthiest of all the races will be sent first. In a new green world we can start again, without the mistakes of the past. The men now in charge inform me that some application of your device can be made to avoid deep space collisions with meteors, asteroids and so on."

Lucas was unable to speak. He felt no shame at the tears that streaked his face.

Ladu said, "My people will come here and release you. After nightfall you will be picked up and taken to the airfield. The girl can go with you." Once again he laughed. "Only because, knowing the emotional weaknesses of the second-class mind, I am certain you would be of no value to the project without her."

Emery Ladu went back through the yellow draperies. They fell into place behind him, swayed slightly and were still.

Peter Lucas and Ellen Morrit sat side by side and listened for the sounds of those who would come to release them, to free them forever.

By Margaret St. Clair

BRIDE OF ETERNITY

She had waited eons for her subjects—until the dark day she awoke to a world too cruel to love her, yet too fond to let her die!

THE METEORITE, Galton and Phillips decided when they began to excavate, must have fallen after Ganymede had lost its atmosphere: the damage it had done was too extensive for the impact to have been cushioned by air. It had plowed into the craggy surface of the planetoid like a slingshot into a ball of mud. It had hit so hard that it had brought half the mountain down over the chamber where the queen and her followers lay.

Galton and Phillips had to work for days, even with power tools, to clear the debris away from the opening. And when they had got inside at last, yesterday morning, they had found the chamber's vaulted roof crushed in. Almost the whole vast room had been choked with rock. The queen's followers must have died under it, without waking, while still in the imago-state. Only the queen herself, lying alone at the extreme end of the chamber, had survived.

The insignia of her royal rank had fallen into dust eon upon eon ago. Only the green smarag on her thumb told who she was. Now she lay on the naked rock, her limbs relaxed but icy cold, and she smiled a little. She must have been smiling when she went into the imago-state. Her heavy black hair lay in ringlets over her golden shoulders, and her mouth was a dusky rose. One of her four-fingered hands had loosely gripped a square tablet of rhodium.

Phillips, shaking with excitement, had drawn it from between her fingers and read the message on it. The simple script of the great race—the race that had built cities on Eschaton and Pluto, and had an outpost on Ganymede—was easy enough for an archaeologist to decipher. Rather grudgingly Phillips had translated it for Galton. This was the way the message ran:

"Dejaleira to Crysaor: Greeting. The relief ship you were to bring us is long overdue, though we are confident that it will come. Our supplies are running low. Therefore, as was agreed, we are going into the Sleep. Awaken us. My love, my love! Do not be long!"

She had written the message to Crysaor and then lain down, smiling a little, for her long sleep. Galton, looking down at her relaxed golden body lying on the bare rock, felt awe tightening the scalp on his head.



Once more the older man made an adjustment. And this time there was a response. Dejaleira stirred.

How long had she been lying there? She had come to Ganymede when the sun had been a star so hot that Pluto and Eschaton, the farthest planet, were warm and green and habitable. Earth and Venus and Mars had been incandescent blobs then and Ganymede, the cold dead moon, must have been nearly as hot as Mercury was today. The time was so vast that Galton felt his mind reeling back dizzily from contemplation of it. Millenia, in it, had been less than the seconds scattered lightly by a ticking clock. And through all that time Dejaleira had lain on the bare rock, waiting. She had lain there waiting for Crysaor, who did not come.

"Do you know what this means?" Phillips demanded harshly. He was almost choking with emotion. Galton, turning to look at his chief, felt a twinge of uneasiness. Phillips was always nervous, highly-keyed; but now he was jerking so much that he could hardly talk.

"Do you realize what it means?" Phillips repeated. He knotted his gloved fingers together and dragged at them. "We've found a living member of the great race! Who knows what she'll be able to tell us when we revive her? Phases of the science of the great race that we've never been able to comprehend will be clear to us. The star drive, for example, and their fourth-dimensional surgery—dozens of things! Perhaps she'll be able to tell us what it was that emptied the cities of Eschaton and Pluto in a day, emptied them so that no one ever came back. The historians have been arguing over that for years. And the Engulfment, and the natures of admixed pure negatives. She'll be able to explain so many things!"

Phillips halted, his gray eyes blazing. A little more calmly, he continued, "Cosmic matters, too. What makes a star, how a solar system is born. This is a great day for science, Galton. I don't think we can overestimate its importance. Do you realize this, that her people may have witnessed the creation of our sun?"

Galton shrugged. Phillips' enthusiasm vaguely repelled him. "If she can be revived," he said cautiously.

"If!" Phillips replied buoyantly. His tension seemed to have given place to expansiveness. "There's no if about it. Animals found in the Sleep in the museums on Pluto have been revived successfully. There's no need to anticipate trouble with her."

"They weren't highly organized animals. Only one of them was a mammal. We don't understand the imago-state perfectly yet. The process is full of difficulties."

"Oh, nonsense. I'm perfectly confident that I can carry it out satisfactorily.'

Galton stared incredulously at his chief. After an instant he said, "Do you mean you're going to try to revive her yourself?"

"Certainly. Why not?" The older man's eyes were challenging.

"Because—well, in the first place, Phillips, you're not a biologist. You haven't got the knowledge, you haven't got the skill, to try a thing like this. If she's to be revived, she should be taken back to Terra for it, where the finest brains in terrestrial science can collaborate on the job.

"In the second place even if you have the technique and the knowledge, what would you use for power? There's nothing, not even rust, left of the machines the queen's people would have used to revive her. They used Ganymede's magnetic currents as a power source. What would you use? And in the third place, reviving her here might be dangerous to us. The

revivification process sets up severe ground stresses. Ganymede's crust is none too stable. Do you want to bring the mountain down on us?"

Phillips showed his teeth in a laugh. "How thorough you are, my boy," he said nastily. "To take your points in order, one, I consider myself quite the equal in knowledge and skill of any scientist on Terra. Two, I intend to use the power units from the ship and both lifecraft, and I think I can just make it. I shan't have any power to spare, but it will be adequate. And three, if I see any evidences of strain, I'll use repulsors at the proper places. Have you any further objections?"

"Phillips, listen, you're acting—" Galton bit back the words. Once, by a clerk's mistake, he had seen Phillips' psychological rating card. In the space marked "General Estimate" some psychiatrist had written, "Brilliant, but inherently unstable."

Galton tried again, forcing himself to speak calmly. "Phillips, it's dangerous. You might hurt her—you might kill her."

"Hurt her?" Phillips' face changed a little. "Hurt her?" he said again. He walked over to where Dejaleira was lying. He bent over and, very lightly, touched her bare, round knee. "Beautiful," he said softly, "beautiful. Isn't she lovely, Galton? Have you ever seen anything like her? And you think I'd hurt her! Why, I'd sooner lose my right arm. I wouldn't trust anyone but myself to waken her."

Galton's eyes widened. So that was it!

For a moment he hunted for the right words. "I know you'll be careful with her, Phillips," he answered. "It isn't that I doubt your ability. But wouldn't it be better to take her back to Terra? You can't—"

"Be quiet," Phillips ordered harshly. He turned back to Galton. The gleam of tenderness had left his face. "I know what you're trying to do. You want to cheat me out of waking her. That's your game. You've always been jealous of me.

"Well, you're not going to do it. When you joined our little archaeological expedition, you accepted semi-military discipline. You're going to help me waken Dejaleira. Those are orders. Orders, my boy."

Galton's face grew wooden. "Yes, sir," he replied.

WHEN night—or that portion of time recurrently allotted to sleeping—came, Galton tossed wakefully in his bunk. At last he turned on the dim blue light over his head and looked across to where Phillips lay. The older man, as if conscious of his gaze, moved jerkily. He put one hand to his mouth and mumbled disjointed syllables.

Galton swung his legs over the edge of his bunk and sat there for a moment. Then he rose and softly left the cabin. In the first airlock he put on his suit. He passed through the second lock and out to the surface of Ganymede.

It was quite dark. This was the side of Ganymede which the satellite keeps eternally turned away from Jupiter, so the lowering big red disk was not in the sky, and the sun was invisible at this point in Ganymede's orbit. Even if it had been shining, its light at this distance was feeble and dilute. Galton switched on his helmet light and went hopping and clambering over the rock-strewn terrain toward the chamber where the queen was. He went in.

He walked through the big airless chamber till he came to where Dejaleira lay. For a long time he stood looking down at her. In the light from his helmet her golden limbs seemed to

sparkle faintly and her hair was darker than the sky outside. "Poor little queen," he said at last, "poor lost little queen." He turned and went back to the ship.

Inside, he took off his suit. He went to the cabin door and listened. Phillips still seemed to be sleeping. Galton nodded to himself. He went aft through the narrow passage until he came to the lifecraft.

Galton hesitated only briefly. Then he took a heavy wrench and went to work on the power units. Before he finished he was sweating hard; the power units had been designed to take a lot of punishment before giving up. But when he stopped he knew, with solid satisfaction, that not another erg would flow through them. It would take the resources of a machine shop to get the power units in the lifecraft functioning again.

Galton looked down at the wreckage with a faint grin. It might be awkward if anything happened to the main power drive in the Heinrich Schliemann, but he couldn't help that. The main point was that now there could be no question of Phillips' trying to revive Dejaleira. Galton grinned once more. He went back to the cabin and lay down in his bunk. Almost instantly he was asleep.

PHILLIPS discovered the destruction in what was, conventionally speaking, late afternoon. He came up to Galton waving his arms and sputtering furiously about vandalism and insubordination, and Galton listened stolidly. When Phillips' rage had worn itself out—much more quickly than Galton had expected—Phillips cleared his throat.

"I'll report this when we get back to Terra, Galton," he said formally. "It will go into your record to stay. Meanwhile—" he smiled bleakly—"we'll continue with our excavation as planned. We can't let your childishness ruin the expedition, can we? We've got to make a success of it to show Central we were right in coming here to dig. You know how negative their attitude was. There's still a great deal of work for us to do.

"I propose, Galton, that we bury the hatchet, at least for the time. As long as we're on Ganymede. we'll cooperate. Do you agree?"

"Yes," Galton answered. He felt a little surprised.

"Good! We'll have a drink together, to show no harm's been done. Eh, my boy?"

"All right."

Phillips opened the little bar cabinet and fussed around with the bar things. "What'll you have, my boy?" he asked.

"Phlomis, I guess. No, wait. I think I'd rather have rhum."

"Better make it phlomis," Phillips advised. He seemed to have recovered completely from his anger at Galton. "That's what I've poured." He handed the glass to Galton.

Phillips raised his own drink. "To —Dejaleira," he said lightly.

Galton nodded. Politely he drank. Ordinarily he liked phlomis, but at the moment the liquor's dry, cardboardy taste was unpalatable. He wished Phillips had given him rhum.

"One more," the gray-haired archaeologist said, "and then we'll get back to work. We've got a lot of cataloguing to do. That phlomis goes down well, doesn't it?"

This time they drank more leisurely. "Galton," Phillips said abruptly, "why are you jealous of me?"

"Jealous? I'm not." Galton was having difficulty in replying. His tongue was thick and he felt an unaccountable dizziness.

"Oh, yes you are. I'd noticed it before. But now . . . You must be in love with our little queen yourself."

Galton tried to answer, to deny the accusation. He could not speak. The cabin was moving about him giddily, advancing in swollen waves that alternated with blackness. He tried to put his glass down, and it dropped into blackness. He leaned forward toward Phillips, and blackness swallowed him up.

AFTER that there was a long time when Galton fought tormentedly for consciousness. He struggled toward it desperately through choking layers of dreams, but they were always too thick for him. Now and again he would rise almost to the surface He would be given water and would drink greedily. Then there would be a sting in his shoulder and he would go down, still fighting, under the heavy, hateful weight of oblivion.

He came to himself at last. It took him time to get his eyes to focus. When he could see reasonably well he found that he had been tied to one of the stone pillars at the extreme outer end of the hall where Dejaleira lay. He felt a great exhaustion; it was hard for him to move his head.

This was reasonable enough. Phillips had been keeping him drugged for nearly a week, and during that time he had had no food, only water. To the depletion of his tissues was added the backlash of the drug debauch Phillips had inflicted on him. If it had not been for his bonds and the support given him by his spacesuit, he would not have been able to stand.

The hall was brightly lighted. Phillips had put fluors in the ceiling. Down at the far end Phillips and another man were moving about, arranging machinery. Even in his weakness Galton felt a shock of surprise. Who could the stranger be?

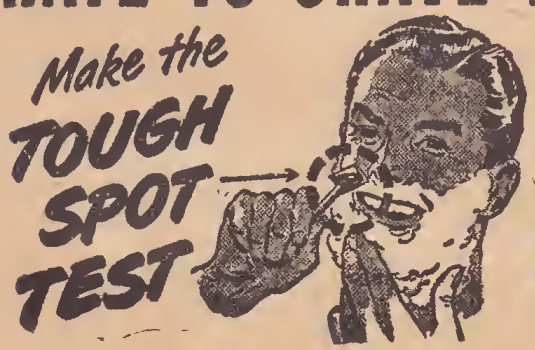
Phillips came walking up to the pillar where Galton was. He looked at him critically. "Conscious again, I see," he said. "I thought it was about time." The older man's face looked strained and tired, but his eyes had a restless brightness. He had impressed Galton as unstable before. Now he seemed a little mad.

"Phillips, who's that man? What's he doing here?"

"You mean McGirk?" Phillips gave a thin smile. "Why, he landed near our ship sixty hours or so ago. A most fortunate landing for me. I'd been reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the Schliemann's power units were quite inadequate for reviving Queen Dejaleira. It was really very naughty of you to smash up the units in the lifecraft.

"But McGirk has proved most co-

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operative. We've rigged up power lines from both ships now and I feel we're at the end of our difficulties. McGirk's not much to look at but for a man of his type he has a surprising interest in pure science. He's almost as interested as I am in reviving the queen. As to what he's doing on Ganymede—well, I rather think he landed here because the space patrol is after him."

"You mean he's a criminal?"

"Hush, my boy! His radio may be on. Well, he may be something of the sort. He wanted to kill you, but I felt it was only fair to let you witness the reawakening of the queen.

"Our biggest trouble, at present, is oxygen. When Dejaleira wakens she'll need air, and we can't put her in a suit because it would interfere with the field. And making the hall airtight is quite impractical. It leaks like a sieve. Too bad the field's dangerous, or we could have revived her inside the ship. But we'll think of something, we'll think of something.

"Notice the repulsors? They're to keep the ceiling up."

He nodded and went back to where McGirk was working. Galton stared after him. He felt sick. If they failed, Dejaleira would die. And if she lived, McGirk . . .

He threw himself as hard as he could against the ropes. It was no use. Even if he had had his normal strength he could have done nothing with them. McGirk had tied him up scientifically. There were no lax strands or conveniently handy ends.

There was a buzz in his helmet as McGirk turned his communicator on. "All set, Phillips?" he asked in a rumbling voice.

"Just about. Wait, though. I've been thinking about the oxygen problem, and it seems to me that the best solution would be a mesh screen. It's neutral. What do you think?"

"Sure, I guess so. Whatever you say. All I want is to have her—" he gestured with his thumb toward the slab on which Dejaleira was lying—"wake up."

"Very well, then. Go back to the ship and bring me . . ." Phillips began a long list of items. McGirk listened, nodding his head. As he shambled past Galton on his way to the Schliemann, he gave the bound man a hard, bright grin. Galton received an indelible impression of a rat's hungry, snarling face. He felt a revulsion and hatred so strong that it almost nauseated him.

"You might as well stop throwing yourself about, Galton," Phillips said without turning. He was still busy near Dejaleira, making connections and setting screws.

McGirk came back, staggering under an enormous load. Phillips helped him release himself, and they went to work at once. Galton listened wretchedly, trying not to hear their brief exchanges. Dejaleira . . . Dejaleira . . . it would be better if she died.

"That's about it," Phillips said to McGirk at last. "Oh, yes, we'd better put another repulsor down near our friend. I don't like the look of the rock there. Point it up at an angle of about forty degrees. No, nearer him. That's fine."

"Are you going to start it now?" McGirk asked expectantly.

"Yes." His face changed. "What's that?" he demanded sharply. "McGirk! Look out! There's someone coming through the door!"

McGirk whirled about, his hand on his blaster. And as he turned Phillips raised his own blaster and shot him neatly through the back. He fell soundlessly.

"I'm afraid that was necessary," Phillips said, smiling at Galton benig-

nantly. "It did occur to me that McGirk's interest in pure science might not be quite so great as it seemed. I felt, as regards Dejaleira, that he was not altogether disinterested. So . . .

"I'll leave him here. He won't be in the way. And now . . ."

He wheeled a banked switchboard toward Galton. "The field's dangerous," he explained, "to organisms not in the imago-state. One has to keep at a distance. As of course you know." He looked intently at a chronometer. His hand hovered above a switch. "Now," he said.

THERE was no sound in the airless chamber, but Galton felt a deep grinding throb through the rock under his feet. It subsided gradually, as though it yielded to some muting, repressing force. The scattering of repulsors in the chamber was arcing steadily, the odd lambent field flowing upward from them. Down at the end of the rock-hewn chamber the light had turned to a deep emerald green.

"Eight point two three five seconds," Phillips said. He depressed another switch. The light around Dejaleira shifted to a pale, icy blue. "We've nearly a minute of this," Phillips said. "The field's building up."

Galton sagged against his bonds. There was nothing he could do.

Phillips turned another switch. Again there came that deep vibration in the rock. The field around Dejaleira turned to creeping, corpuscular gold. "Odd, isn't it," Phillips said reflectively, "how changes in the visible spectrum accompany the frequencies to which we aren't sensitive? I wish I knew a little more about the theory behind those sequences. Not that it matters a great deal. Now to go back to the tonic."

He moved a pointer and the light around Dejaleira shifted through a rainbow spectral sequence back to white. Phillips gave a deep-drawn sigh. "Dejaleira," he said in a light whisper, as if in intimate self-communion, "Dejaleira, my beautiful darling, you haven't long to wait."

In his helplessness, Galton had begun once more to fight his bonds. Now a discovery turned him momentarily rigid. He had found out that he could move his right foot.

He could move his right foot nearly five inches away from the pillar to which he was tied. Nearly five inches. What use could he make of this fractional bit of freedom?

He began to move about, straining against the ropes, for fear his sudden inactivity should have made Phillips suspicious. He need not have bothered; Phillips had no eyes for him. All his faculties were fixed on the rock slab where Dejaleira lay.

Once more the older man made an adjustment. The light around the queen turned to pale gold. And this time there was a response. Dejaleira stirred.

Nothing that had happened yet had seemed to Galton so horrible. In a burning flash of insight he saw how much better it would have been if she had died. She was waking to a world so remote from her own that the very concept of the change would be meaningless. She was waking on the far side of an abyss of time so vast that it could only terrify.

But she would live now and Phillips would take her back to Terra with him. Her sweet antique beauty would be the spoil of billions of pairs of greedy eyes. The inhabitants of three planets would go mad over her. She would be stared at, questioned, prodded, pulled, examined, idolized. And in the middle of the furor she would be utterly alone.

Poor lost Dejaleira, poor time-strayed queen. She would be more lonely than any human being had ever been.

The field around Dejaleira deepened into amber gold. "Darling, darling," Phillips was breathing over and over again. "You'll have to stay in the field a little while longer, my darling. Else you might go back into the Sleep. Queen Dejaleira, my queen. When you're out of the Sleep I'm going to kneel down at your feet and worship you."

Once more Dejaleira stirred. Her eyes opened. Slowly she sat up, leaning on one slender arm. Her bright breast moved in a long sigh. For a moment her face wore a look that Galton was to treasure in bitter-sweet memory as long as he lived—a look of radiant, unearthly joy. Its poignancy caught at his heart.

The seconds passed. The joy faded from the queen's face. There was uncertainty there now, and the beginning of fear. Once more she looked about the ruined chamber. Her soft lips moved, trembled as if she were about to speak.

Galton gathered himself. He could not bear it. He drew his right foot back as far as the ropes would let him and then lunged out with all his force at the repulsor McGirk had placed near his feet.

The repulsor tottered for a moment and then fell over on the rock. For a moment its arc flared up in a dazzle of light and sputtered angrily. Abruptly its field died away. A second later Galton felt the rock floor grate portentously under him. The rock ceiling shook.

Phillips spun round. Within his helmet his face had gone dirty white. He mouthed something, inarticulate with fury. Then he raised his blaster and fired at Galton point-blank.

The shot went wild, crashed into the ceiling. For a full second everything seemed to hang suspended. And then the mountain began to fall on the two men.

The amber field around Dejaleira flickered out. An instant later the light from the fluors followed it. But before the lights went out finally, Galton had time to see what he was to remember all his life, and always with a sense of comfort—Dejaleira, released from the field, sinking down on her stone bed again, sinking with relaxed limbs back into the Sleep. Then the rocks came raining down between. The stone curtain obliterated everything.

Galton recovered consciousness many hours later. There was an excruciating pain in his leg. He was still tied to the stone pillar, but it had, he found out by wriggling, broken off a little above his waist.

The stone-choked hall was quite dark.

Galton, biting his lip often, managed to work his ropes up over the column's fractured end. Every motion increased the agonizing pain in his leg. When his hands were free he felt along his leg and discovered that it was broken, as he had thought. From the character of the pain, the fracture must be compound.

He tried his helmet light. It still worked, though the lens was cracked. With the help of the wavering spot of light he went to work on the ropes on his legs. Once he nearly fainted. It was a long time before his feet were free.

He sank down on the rock-strewn floor to rest. Behind him a hand-span of sky was visible, with a star or two. It should be possible for him to get back to the ship. Was Phillips still alive?

"Phillips!" he called into his helmet radio. "Phillips! Phillips!" There was no answer.

Galton sent the beam of his light bobbing about the rock-cumbered space. At last, crushed against the floor, he found what looked like an arm and hand. He dragged himself over to it.

It was Phillips.

Painfully Galton cleared some of the rocks away. Then he found that Phillips' oxygen tank was ruptured and all the air was gone. Phillips must have died, while still unconscious, of asphxia. He would have died from the weight of rock piled on him in any case.

Dejaleira, Galton knew, was still safe. The part of the chamber where she lay had been dug deep into the heart of the rock. If the meteor impact had not broken the roof there, the far slighter earthquake Galton had produced could not have done so.

Galton dragged himself toward the patch of sky. Hours later he emerged on the surface of Ganymede. He had to pause several times to rest, but at last he was back inside the ship.

The fracture of his leg was compound, as he had thought. He treated it as well as he could. Then he fed data into the automatic astrogator for a terrestrial course.

As the Schleimann jetted tup from Ganymede, bound for home, Galton looked back. Already the little moon was showing a curvature. "Good-by, Dejaleira," Galton said.

For nobody was coming here again. When Galton got back to Terra he would tell Central that he and Phillips had found nothing. Phillips, he would tell them, had grown more and more morose at their lack of success. At last he had insisted, despite Galton's protests, in resorting to deep electric blasting. In the resultant earthslide he had been killed and Galton badly hurt.

Central Archaeology would believe the story. They had been less than lukewarm toward the expedition, anyway; only Phillips' reputation had made them license it. And Phillips' known instability would make the electric blasting plausible. Ganymede would be crossed, with a sigh of relief, from Center's books. Nobody would dig there again. There would be no reason to.

This was the best way for it to end. Dejaleira and her two awakeners would lie behind the rock-heaps. Time would pass and the bodies of the two men would crumble into dust at last, but Dejaleira would go on waiting. She would lie on the rock slab waiting, just quietly waiting, while eternity went by.

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THE MINIATURE

In the vault, he knew nothing of his long journey between birth and death. . . . But what dreams disturbed the sleep of this man, whose body was more precious than diamonds?

By Peter Reed

AS JEDEDIAH AMBERSON stepped through the bronze, marble and black-glass doorway of the City National Bank on Wall Street, he felt the strange jar. It was, he thought, almost a tremor. Once he had been in Tepoztlan, Mexico, on a Guggenheim grant, doing research on primitive barter systems, and during the night a small earthquake had awakened him.

This was much the same feeling. But he stood inside the bank and heard the unruffled hum of activity, heard no shouts of surprise. And, even through the heavy door he could hear the conversation of passers-by on the sidewalk.

He shrugged, beginning to wonder if it was something within himself, some tiny constriction of blood in the brain. It had been a trifle like that feeling which comes just before fainting. Jedediah Amberson had fainted once.

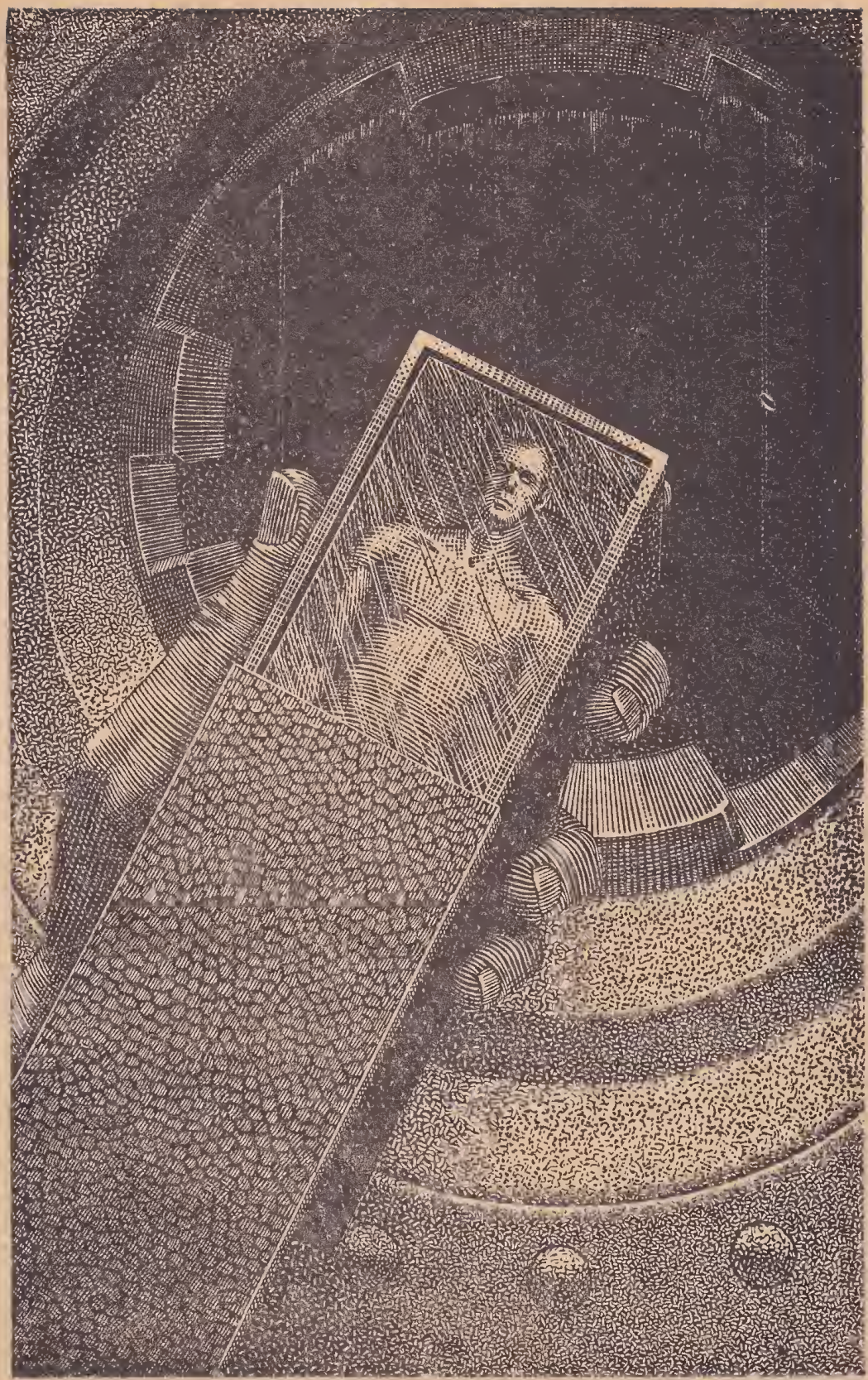
Fumbling in his pocket for the checkbook, he walked, with his long loose stride, over to a chest-high marble counter. He hadn't been in the main office of the bank since he had taken out his account. Usually he patronized the branch near the University, but today, finding himself in the neighborhood and remembering that he was low on cash, he had decided to brave the gaudy dignity of the massive institution of finance.

For, though Jed Amberson dealt mentally in billions, and used such figures familiarly in dealing with his classes in economics, he was basically a rather timid and uncertain man and he had a cold fear of the scornful eyes of tellers who might look askance at the small check he would present at the window.

He made it out for twenty dollars, five more than he would have requested had he gone to the familiar little branch office.

Jedediah Amberson was not a man to take much note of his surroundings. He was, at the time, occupied in writing a text, and the problems it presented were so intricate that he had recently found himself walking directly into other pedestrians and being snatched

● "Alive?" Jed asked.



back onto the curb by helpful souls who didn't want to see him truck-mashed before their eyes. Just the day before he had gone into his bedroom in mid-afternoon to change his shoes and had only awakened from his profound thoughts when he found himself, clad in pajamas, brushing his teeth before the bathroom mirror.

He took his place in the line before a window. He was mentally extrapolating the trend line of one of J. M. Keynes' debt charts when a chill voice said, "Well!"

He found that he had moved up to the window itself and the teller was waiting for his check. He flushed and said, "Oh! Sorry." He tried to push the check under the grill, but it fluttered out of his hand. As he stooped to get it, his hat rolled off.

At last recovering both hat and check, he stood up, smiled painfully and pushed the check under the grill.

The young man took it, and Jed Amberson finally grew aware that he was spending a long time looking at the check. Jed strained his neck around and looked to see if he had remembered to sign it. He had.

Only then did he notice the way the young man behind the window was dressed. He wore a deep wine-colored sports shirt, collarless and open at the throat. At the point where the counter bisected him, Jedediah could see that the young man wore green-gray slacks with at least a six-inch waistband of ocher yellow. .

Jed had a childlike love of parties, sufficient to overcome his chronic self-consciousness. He said, in a pleased tone, "Ah, some sort of festival?"

The teller had a silken wisp of beard on his chin. He leaned almost frighteningly close to the grill, aiming the wisp of beard at Amberson as he gave him a careful scrutiny.

"We are busy here," the teller said. "Take your childish little game across street and attempt it on them."

Though shy, Jedediah was able to call on hidden stores of indignation when he felt himself wronged. He straightened slowly and said, with dignity, "I have an account here and I suggest you cash my check as quickly and quietly as possible."

The teller glanced beyond Jedediah and waved the silky beard in a taut half circle, a "come here" gesture.

Jedediah turned and gasped as he faced the bank guard. The man wore a salmon-pink uniform with enormously padded shoulders. He had a thumb hooked in his belt, his hand close to the plastic bowl of what seemed to be a child's bubble pipe.

The guard jerked his other thumb toward the door and said, "Ride off, honorable sir."

Jedediah said, "I don't care much for the comic-opera atmosphere of this bank. Please advise me of my balance and I will withdraw it all and put it somewhere where I'll be treated properly."

The guard reached out, clamped Jed's thin arm in a meaty hand and yanked him in the general direction of the door. Jed intensely disliked being touched or pushed or pulled. He bunched his left hand into a large knobbly fist and thrust it with vigor into the exact middle of the guard's face.

The guard grunted as he sat down on the tile floor. The ridiculous bubble pipe came out, and was aimed at Jed. He heard no sound of explosion, but suddenly there was a large cold area in his middle that felt the size of a basketball. And when he tried to move, the area of cold turned into an area of pain so intense that it nauseated him. It took but two tiny attempts to

prove to him that he could achieve relative comfort only by standing absolutely still. The ability to breathe and to turn his eyes in their sockets seemed the only freedom of motion left to him.

The guard said, tenderly touching his puffed upper lip, "Don't drop signal, Harry. We can handle this without flicks." He got slowly to his feet, keeping the toy weapon centered on Jedediah.

Other customers stood at a respectful distance, curious and interested. A fussy little bald-headed man came trotting up, carrying himself with an air of authority. He wore pastel-blue pajamas with a gold medallion over the heart.

The guard stiffened. "Nothing we can't handle, Mr. Greenbush."

"Indeed!" Mr. Greenbush said, his voice like a terrier's bark. "Indeed! You seem to be creating enough disturbance at this moment. Couldn't you have exported him more quietly?"

"Bank was busy," the teller said. "I didn't notice him till he got right up to window."

Mr. Greenbush stared at Jedediah. He said, "He looks reasonable enough, Palmer. Turn it off."

Jed took a deep, grateful breath as the chill area suddenly departed. He said weakly, "I demand an explanation."

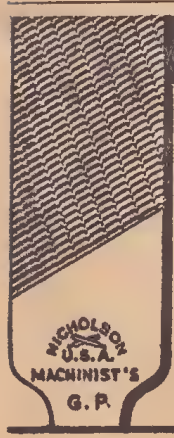
Mr. Greenbush took the check the teller handed him and, accompanied by the guard, led Jed over to one side. He smiled in what was intended to be a fatherly fashion. He said, glancing at the signature on the check, "Mr. Amberson, surely you must realize, or your patrons must realize, that City National Bank is not sort of organization to lend its facilities to inane promotional gestures."

Jedediah had long since begun to have a feeling of nightmare. He stared at the little man in blue pajamas. "Promotional gestures?"

"Of course, my dear fellow. For what other reason would you come here dressed as you are and present this . . . this document."

"Dressed?" Jed looked down at his slightly baggy gray suit, his white shirt, his blue necktie and cordovan shoes. Then he stared around at the customers of the bank who had long since ceased to notice the little tableau. He saw that the men wore the sort of clothes considered rather extreme at the most exclusive of private beaches. He was particularly intrigued by one fellow who wore a cerise silk shirt, open to the waist, emerald green shorts to his knees, and calf-length pink nylons.

The women, he noticed, all wore dim shades of deep gray or brown, and a



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standard costume consisting of a halter, a short flared skirt that ended just above the knees and a knit cap pulled well down over the hair.

Amberson said, "Uh. Something special going on."

"Evidently. Suppose you explain."

"Me explain! Look, I can show you identification. I'm an Associate Professor of Economics at Columbia and I—" He reached for his hip pocket. Once again the ball of pain entered his vitals. The guard stepped over to him, reached into each of his pockets in turn, handed the contents to Mr. Greenbush.

Then the pressure was released. "I am certainly going to give your high-handed procedures here as much publicity as I can," Jed said angrily.

But Greenbush ignored him. Greenbush had opened his change purse and had taken out a fifty-cent piece. Greenbush held the coin much as a superstitious savage would have held a mirror. He made tiny bleating sounds. At last he said, his voice thin and strained, "Nineteen forty-nine mint condition! What do you want for it?"

"Just cash my check and let me go," Jed said wearily. "You're all crazy here. Why shouldn't this year's coins be in mint condition?"

"Bring him into my office," Greenbush said in a frenzy.

"But I—" Jed protested. He stopped as the guard raised the weapon once more. Jed meekly followed Greenbush back through the bank. He decided that it was a case of mistaken identity. He could call his department from the office. It would all be straightened out, with apologies.

WITH the door closed behind the two of them, Jed looked around the office. The walls were a particularly liverish and luminescent yellow-green. The desk was a block of plastic balanced precariously on one slim pedestal no bigger around then a lead pencil. The chairs gave him a dizzy feeling. They looked comfortable, but as far as he could see, they were equipped only with front legs. He could not see why they remained upright.

"Please sit there," Greenbush said.

Jed lowered himself into the chair with great caution. It yielded slightly, then seemed to clasp him with an almost embarrassing warmth, as though he sat on the pneumatic lap of an exceptionally large woman.

Greenbush came over to him, pointed to Jed's wristwatch and said, "Give me that, too."

"I didn't come for a loan," Jed said.

"Don't be ass. You'll get all back."

Greenbush sat behind his desk, with the little pile of Jed's possessions in front of him. He made little mumbling sounds as he prodded and poked and pried. He seemed very interested in the money. He listened to the watch tick and said, "Mmm. Spring mechanical."

"No. It runs on atomic power," Jed said bitterly. Greenbush didn't answer.

From the back of Jed's wallet, Greenbush took the picture of Helen. He touched the glossy surface, said, "Two-dimensional."

After what seemed an interminable period, Mr. Greenbush leaned back, put the tips of his fingers together and said, "Amberson, you are fortunate that you contacted me."

"I can visualize two schools of thought on that," Jed said stiffly.

Greenbush smiled. "You see, Amberson, I am coin collector and also antiquarian. It is possible National Museum might have material to equip you, but their stuff would be obviously old. I am reasonable man, and I know there must be explanation for all

hings." He fixed Jed with his sharp bright eyes, leaned slowly forward and said, "How did you get here?"

"Why, I walked through your front door." Jed suddenly frowned. "There was a strange jar when I did so. A dislocation, a feeling of being violently twisted in here." He tapped his temple with a thin finger.

"That's why I say you are fortunate. Some other bank might have had you in deviate ward by now where they'd be needling out slices of your frontal lobes."

"Is it too much to ask down here to get a small check cashed?"

"Not too much to ask in nineteen forty-nine, I'm sure. And I am ready to believe you are product of nineteen forty-nine. But, my dear Amberson, this is year eighty-three under Gradzinger calendar."

"For a practical joke, Greenbush, this is pretty ponderous."

Greenbush shrugged, touched a button on the desk. The wide draperies slithered slowly back from the huge window. "Walk over and take look, Amberson. Is that your world?"

Jed stood at the window. His stomach clamped into a small tight knot which slowly rose up into his throat. His eyes widened until the lids hurt. He steadied himself with his fingertips against the glass and took several deep, aching breaths. Then he turned somehow and walked, with knees that threatened to bend both ways, back to the chair. The draperies rustled back into position.

"No," Jed said weakly, "this isn't my world." He rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand, finding there a cold and faintly oily perspiration. "I had two classes this morning. I came down to look up certain documents. Everything was fine. And then I came in . . . how . . ."

Greenbush pursed his lips. "How? Who can say? I'm banker, not temporal tech. Doubtless you'd like to return to your own environment. I will signal Department of Temporal Technics at Columbia where you were employed so many years ago. . . ."

"That particular phraseology, Mr. Greenbush, I find rather disturbing."

"Sorry." Greenbush stood up. "Wait here. My communicator is deranged. I'll have to use other office."

"Can't we go there? To the University?"

"I wouldn't advise it. In popular shows I've seen on subject, point of entry is always important. I rather postulate they'll assist you back through front door."

Greenbush was at the office door. Jed said, "Have—have you people sent humans back and forth in time?"

"No. They send neutrons and gravitons or something like those. Ten minutes in future or ten minutes in past. Very intricate. Enormous energy problem. Way over my head."

While Greenbush was gone, Jed methodically collected his belongings from the desk and stowed them away in his pockets. Greenbush bustled in and said, "They'll be over in half hour with necessary equipment. They think they can help you."

Half an hour. Jed said, "As long as I'm here, I wonder if I could impose? You see, I have attempted to predict certain long-range trends in monetary procedures. Your currency would be—"

"Of course, my dear fellow! Of course! Kindred interest, etcet. What would you like to know?"

"Can I see some of your currency?"

Greenbush shoved some small pellets of plastic across the desk. They were made from intricate molds. The inscription was in a sort of shorthand

English. "Those are universal, of course," Greenbush said.

Two of them were for twenty-five cents and the other for fifty cents. Jed was surprised to see so little change from the money of his own day.

"One hundred cents equals dollar, just as in your times," Greenbush said.

"Backed by gold, of course," Jed said.

Greenbush gasped and then laughed. "What ludicrous idea! Any fool with public-school education has learned enough about transmutation of elements to make five tons of gold in afternoon, or of platinum or zinc or any other metal or alloy of metal you desire."

"Backed by a unit of power? An erg or something?" Jed asked with false confidence.

"With power unlimited? With all power anyone wants without charge? You're not doing any better, Amberson."

"By a unit share of national resources maybe?" Jed asked hollowly.

"National is obsolete word. There are no more nations. And world resources are limitless. We create enough for our use. There is no depletion."

"But currency, to have value must be backed by something," Jed protested.

"Obviously!"

"Precious stones?"

"Children play with diamonds as big as baseballs," Greenbush said. "Speaking as economist, Amberson, why was gold used in your day?"

"It was rare, and, where obtainable, could not be obtained without a certain average fixed expenditure of man hours. Thus it wasn't really the metal itself, it was the man hours involved that was the real basis. Look, now you've got me talking in the past tense."

"And quite rightly. Now use your head, Mr. Amberson. In world where power is free, resources are unlimited and no metal or jewel is rare, what is one constant, one user of time, one eternal fixity on which monetary system could be based?"

Jed almost forgot his situation as he labored with the problem. Finally he had an answer, and yet it seemed so incredible that he hardly dared express it. He said in a thin voice, "The creation of a human being is something that probably cannot be shortened or made easy. Is—is human life itself your basis?"

"Bravo!" Greenbush said. "One hundred cents in dollar, and five thousand dollars in HUC. That's brief for Human Unit of Currency."

"But that's slavery! That's—why, that's the height of inhumanity!"

"Don't sputter, my boy, until you know facts."

Jed laughed wildly. "If I'd made my check out for five thousand they'd have given me a—a person!"

"They'd have given you certificate entitling you to HUC. Then you could spend that certificate, you see."

"But suppose I wanted the actual person?"

"Then I suppose we could have obtained one for you from World Reserve Bank. As matter of fact, we have one in our vault now."

"In your vault!"

"Where else would we keep it? Come along. We have time."

THE VAULT was refrigerated. The two armed attendants stood by while Greenbush spun the knob of the inner chamber, slid out the small box. It was of dull silver, and roughly the size of a pound box of candy. Greenbush slid back the grooved lid and Jed, shuddering, looked down through clear ice to the tiny,

naked, perfect figure of an adult male, complete even to the almost invisible wisp of hair on his chest.

"Alive?" Jed asked.

"Naturally. Pretty well suspended, of course." Greenbush slid the lid back, replaced the box in the vault and led the way back to the office.

Once again in the warm clasp of the chair, Jed asked, with a shaking voice, "Could you give me the background on —this amazing currency?"

"Nothing amazing about it. Technic advances made all too easily obtainable through lab methods except living humans. There, due to growth problems and due to —certain amount of non-technic co-operation necessary, things could not be made easily. Full-sized ones were too unwieldy, so lab garcons worked on size till they got them down to what you see. Of course, they are never brought up to level of consciousness. They go from birth bottle to suspension chambers and are held there until adult and then refrigerated and boxed."

Greenbush broke off suddenly and said, "Are you ill?"

"No. No, I guess not."

"Well, when I first went to work for this bank, HUC was unit worth twenty thousand dollars. Then lab techs did some growth acceleration work—age acceleration, more accurate—and that brought price down and put us into rather severe inflationary period. Cup of java went up to dollar and it's stayed there ever since. So World Union stepped in and made it against law to make any more refinements in HUC production. That froze it at five thousand. Things have been stable ever since."

"But they're living, human beings!"

"Now you sound like silly Anti-HUC League. My boy, they wouldn't exist were it not for our need for currency base. They never achieve consciousness. We, in banking business, think of them just as about only manufactured item left in world which cannot be produced in afternoon. Time lag is what gives them their value. Besides, they are no longer in production, of course. Being economist, you must realize overproduction of HUC's would put us back into inflationary period."

At that moment the girl announced that the temporal techs had arrived with their equipment. Jed was led from the office out into the bank proper. The last few customers were let out as the closing hour arrived.

The men from Columbia seemed to have no interest in Jed as a human being. He said hesitantly to one, smiling shyly, "I would think you people would want to keep me here so your

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historians could do research on me."

The tech gave him a look of undisguised contempt. He said, "We know all to be known about your era. Very dull period in world history."

Jed retired, abashed, and watched them set up the massive silvery coil on the inside of the bank door.

The youngest tech said quietly, "This is third time we've had to do this. You people seem to wander into sort of rhythm pattern. Very careless. We had one failure from your era. Garcon named Crater. He wandered too far from point of entry. But you ought to be all opt."

"What do I have to do?"

"Just walk through coil and out door. Adjustment is complicated. If we don't use care you might go back into your own era embedded up to your eyes in pavement. Or again, you might come out forty feet in air. Don't get unbalanced."

"I won't," Jed said fervently.

Greenbush came up and said, "Could you give me that coin you have?"

The young technician turned wearily and said, "Older, he has to leave with everything he brought and he can't take anything other with him. We've got to fit him into same vibratory rhythm. You should know that."

"It is such nice coin," Greenbush sighed.

"If I tried to take something with me?" Jed asked.

"It just wouldn't go, gesell. You would go and it would stay."

Jed thought of another question. He turned to Greenbush. "Before I go, tell me. Where are the HUC's kept?"

"In refrigerated underground vault at place called Fort Knox."

"Come on, come on, you. Just walk straight ahead through coil. Don't hurry. Push door open and go out onto street."

JED STOOD, faintly dizzy, on the afternoon sidewalk of Wall Street in Manhattan. A woman bounced off him, snarled, "Fa godsake, ahya goin' uh comin!". Late papers were tossed off a truck onto the corner. Jed tiptoed over, looked cautiously and saw that the date was Tuesday, June 14th, 1949.

The further the subway took him uptown, the more the keen reality of the three quarters of an hour in the bank faded. By the time he reached his own office, sat down behind his familiar desk, it had become like a fevered dream.

Overwork. That was it. Brain fever. Probably wandered around in a daze. Better take it easy. Might fade off into a world of the imagination and never come back. Skip the book for a month. Start dating Helen again. Relax.

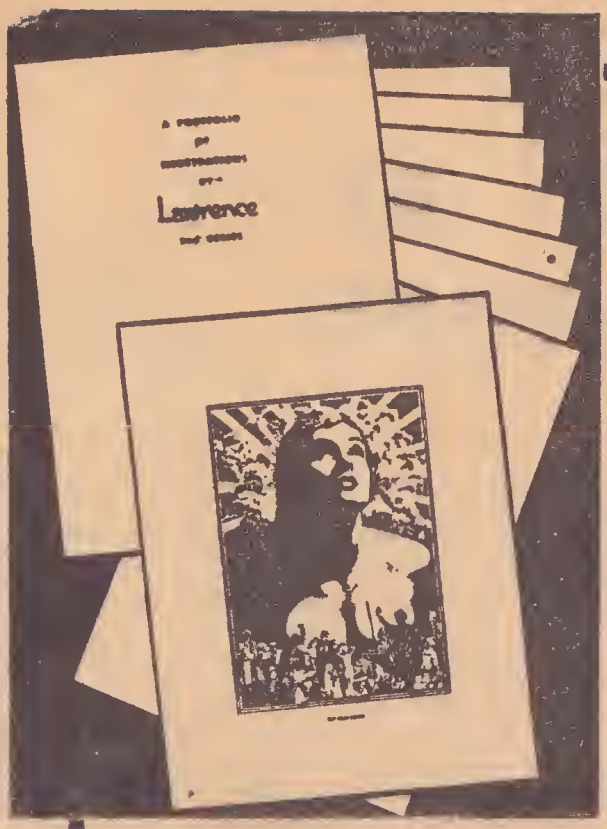
He grinned slowly, content with his decision. "HUC's, indeed!" he said.

Date Helen tonight. Better call her now. Suddenly he remembered that he hadn't cashed a check, and he couldn't take Helen far on a dollar.

He found the check in his pocket, glanced at it, and then found himself sitting rigid in the chair. Without taking his eyes from the check, he pulled open the desk drawer, took out the manuscript entitled, "Probable Bases of Future Monetary Systems," tore it in half and dropped it in the wastebasket.

His breath whistled in pinched nostrils. He heard, in his memory, a voice saying, "You would go and it would stay."

The check was properly made out for twenty dollars. But he had used the ink supplied by the bank. The check looked as though it had been written with a dull knife. The brown desk top showed up through the fragile lace of his signature.



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WORLD OF NO RETURN

By Bryce Walton

IT WAS a white flame arching cross the sky, a thin ribbon fluttering out across the dead sea-bottom. There was a faint glare of white and orange light, the sound of an explosion that barely reached the Watch Tower before it died.

Della sat stiffly. Marla leaned toward her fearfully and said, "That was a spaceship! An Earth ship!"

The memory of the dying flame was still in Della's eyes as she gazed over the endless wasteland of coral fronds and lichen and moss of the dead sea-bottom. "Yes," she whispered. "I'm sure it was an Earth ship!"

"Then report it quickly, Della! We've got to send in a report."

Della didn't move. "No. I'm going to investigate first, myself."

"What—oh, no! Della!" Marla retreated slowly, fearfully, across the interior of the observation dome. "The Council will find out. You know what that means. They'll send you to the Medics. They'll change you!"

Della got up quickly. "A small rocket, probably a man in it. He might still be alive. If I reported it, the Squadmen would pick him up and destroy him. This way, maybe I can talk with him—I'd gladly submit to change, Marla, if first I could only talk, be with someone like myself, if only were free for a little while."

She locked the communications cabinet and dropped the key in the pocket of her brief tunic. "Now, Marla, you can't contact the Council while I'm gone."

Marla whispered. "It's just as bad to leave the Tower without permission. I don't want to be changed. I'll tell! I'll tell!"

Della said with almost savage intensity, "You'd better not. If you do, I'll give the Council the facts on how you burned out those condensers last year; I have proof. I lied for you, something no one else among the Colonists could do. You yourself aren't capable of lying, you'd be horrified at the thought, yet my lying saved you. But I have the evidence and I'll give it to them if you open your mouth about this."

"What's wrong with you, Della? What is this—difference of yours?"

"You wouldn't understand," Della said bitterly. "You couldn't be lonely or sad. You couldn't long for the arms of a lover night after night until it becomes unbearable. Until you'd rather be—destroyed than bear it! Not changed, destroyed! Immortality smashed—"

Della went out the panel, took the stairs that curved down to the base

Under the twin moons of Mars, Cliff, the Earthman, could not live. . . . And Della, poor misguided Della, could not die!



of the Tower. She walked with a tense expectancy toward the place where the rocket had crashed.

Through dense, head-high waste that stretched for thousands of miles across the expanse that had been a sea eons before, she walked, tearing her way through a forest of coral fronds, entwining lichen and pale green fungus and multicolored mosses. From the mountains toward the polar cap the wastes stretched. And there was no life here except the giant red beetles.

Finally her fingers spread back a filmy curtain of rusty lichen, and she bent forward breathlessly. The ship in the starshine was a lifeless silvery-gray shell, crushed, twisted and very still.

She watched for a long time for signs of movement from the shape huddled some distance from the wreckage. The larger moon joined the smaller and the stars paled slightly behind the overhead brilliance. The shadows about the ship shifted through veils of color to deep purple and orange lights.

She cried out softly as the shape got to its feet with slow, painful effort. It was a man. A man. He fell, got to his feet again. Earthman—one thing she knew: he would be a kindred spirit; he would have emotions as she had. That was the reason for the Law that said all Earth people were to be destroyed on sight.

"We broke away from them," the Law said. "Now we defy them. There can never be a synthesis. They are motivated by emotions, they are destruction and evil."

She thought, "He will know my feelings. There's no other living thing on this planet that could understand except a man, this man."

Yet she hesitated.

HER HANDS spread tautly at her sides. He was beautiful. He was tall and broad and his hair was the color of gold. He was taller than any one of the Colonials. He staggered. He was trembling and making odd sounds. Not words, but incoherent noises. Her heart went out to him. He seemed whole and strong on the outside, but maybe there was some kind of inner disruption.

She prayed fervently that this was not so. Only the Medics could repair, and it was so highly specialized that no one else could even attempt it. He might be incapacitated, and if so, she'd be helpless. She couldn't send in a report. They wouldn't fix him up, of course; they would destroy him!

The man swayed, then sank down. He looked up hopelessly at the hurtling larger moon as its flames shattered him with glittering shards of greenish pale light. He shook his head, then buried his face in his arms.

She moved from concealment, crept quietly toward him. Now his words were coherent, but odd. Once the Colonials and the Earth people had spoken the same way, but now there were differences, altered meanings, words she didn't understand. But the emotion he felt was plain to her.

"Lousy ship, lousy luck. The devil with it. A guy crazy enough to test one of Jeffer's experimental drives deserves this. No, that's not right. Starving and freezing to death, that wouldn't be so bad. But nobody deserves getting picked up by these Colonial freaks. The way they kill a guy—"

She thought, he knows he'll be destroyed if caught.

No one knew much about the past, either of the Tribe before it revolted and fled from Earth to Mars, or of the reason behind it all. The past, the his-

tory of the revolt and the times before it, were to be forgotten, conditioned out of memory. Think of today, of tomorrow. But the past was a harmful thing.

There was fear of him. Always she had been taught to be afraid, and to destroy. But slowly the fear was conquered by the other stronger, starved desires. Fear flickered and fought and finally died into a vague spark, and the spark finally seemed to go out.

As she stepped nearer her feet ripped through tendrils of lichen and the man jerked his head up. He slid back, came to his hands and knees, staring. His face seemed to change color, grow paler, and that was odd. His eyes widened. His mouth dropped open. His head bent to either side, and then he jumped to his feet frantically and stood with his knees bent, his hands in front of him.

Afraid, of her! Fear, he shared that emotion in common with all the Colonists, though they could have no other. She understood it thoroughly. But she was hurt that he should be afraid of her, when she felt only love, a hungry trembling yearning for him. She reached out. He backed away.

"Don't be afraid, please!" she said.

His lips trembled. "Where—where did you come from?" His voice was shaky.

She motioned. "Over there. I'm a Watcher, and the Tower is over there a way. You can't see it. I saw your crash."

She moved toward him. This time he didn't back away, but stared at her with wide,wary eyes.

Suddenly he said, "Get it over with! Kill me right now. What do you use, your bare hands? You don't seem to have a weapon." He looked all around. "There are others with you then, hiding?"

She shook her head. "No one else. Just you and I, Earthman."

She leaped forward and gripped his arms and drew him close to her. She noticed that his face was wet, that his face was turning an odd gray color.

"Please don't be afraid," she pleaded. "I saw your ship crash, but I didn't report it. We are forbidden to leave the tower without orders, but I left it. Please, please try to understand!"

"What? Understand what?" he whispered. He jerked free from her. "My ship's wrecked, finished. I can't defend myself, no weapons. No food, no water. I'll starve, freeze in a few nights. Or if not that, I know what you freaks will do to me. What else is there to understand? What are you talking about?"

She said, "A year after I was assigned as a Watcher in the Tower, I learned that I was different from all the others. I can feel emotions, love, longing, loneliness. You understand? Love needs another before it's really love. Someone else who can feel emotion. You're the only one besides me. There's just you and me. I need you. You need me, and—"

His mouth twisted and he mumbled something.

"I need you, Earthman, and I want you," she said simply. She moved toward him again. He backed falteringly toward the wrecked ship. He held up his hands.

"This is crazy!" he cried. "A delusion. I know what you people are. You're trying to pull some damn sadistic game or other! Look here, if you're going to kill me—"

"Oh no, no! Come with me back to the Tower. But we must hurry! I can explain there, but we must hurry! Listen—I'm different from the others here. I'm more—like you. We're just alike, aren't we? We look the same?"

"Yes," he muttered. "But that doesn't make sense. Back on Earth we've been taught what you people are, not much, but enough. No emotions, cold as space, heartless. But you do look like any other woman, only better, much better. And I don't understand it. I was told that any man landing on Mars would be killed, tortured, dissected, treated like a guinea pig—"

She interrupted. "The others here are like that. But I'm different. Now and then they get one like me, a sudden flood of memory that breaks through the mental barriers. Emotions return, feelings, longings come back. When such a thing happens, that one is changed. Emotions are evil, they say, destructive. I don't want that. I want to keep my secret from them—but this difference of mine—it will drive me to madness unless you help me. And you'll also be helping yourself. Just you and I, we'll belong to each other! I'll never report that you're here. That way, you won't be destroyed! Can't you see it now?"

The smaller moon dropped out of sight, and the larger moon plunged toward the mountains leaving scattered threads of indigo. In the thickening shadows, his eyes narrowed as he watched her, listened to her. The night wind cried coldly through the coral fronds. A giant crimson beetle crawled blindly toward the fading moonlight.

"It's crazy," he said. "But maybe there's some truth in it. Maybe you're really here, and feeling this way. Maybe I'm insane."

After a while he touched her shoulder. His fingers felt of her arms, her shoulders, her throat, moved around over her face and down the shining length of her hair. He said in a low voice, "Lovely enough to be my last dream. Peal or not—lovely."

She felt strangely weak. She closed her eyes. It was like a bursting forth of flame, of imprisoned fires released from long bondage. As from a long way off she heard him whispering: "' . . . a savage place! As holy and enchanted as e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted by woman wailing for her demon lover!"

He smiled thinly. "What can I lose? The name's Cliff. Cliff Bailey."

"And I'm Della."

"I don't understand, Della. I don't. But I'm trying. Meanwhile, I've got to figure out what it means. We're told that you people are completely unlike us, that we could never get together. And you're told the same thing. Yet here we are, the same."

She shook his hand. "Please, we can talk about it later, but we have to get back to the Tower. Marla, my Tower companion, is afraid. She's liable to run away from the Tower and report your landing."

She kept his hand as he walked beside her. Now and then he looked back. He sighed as the ship disappeared behind the curtains of the silent waste.

INSIDE the Tower, she saw him stare in awe at the mechanical perfection of the hard glittering steel, the almost silently moving machinery. She opened a panel into a dark room.

"Hide in there, Cliff, for a while, until I settle things with Marla. I'll be back with you very soon. I've locked the Communications cabinet, but Marla might run away. There's another Tower twenty miles distant. If she reached that, the Squadmen would be back here within minutes."

A sound twisted her about. Marla, standing on the spiral silver stairs! Her body was bent in a posture of

frozen terror. She screamed and ran down the fragile stairs toward the exit panel.

Della cried out. "Cliff, help me stop her!"

Della blocked the exit and battered Marla's body back with hard solid blows of her fists. Marla struck back desperately and Della felt the stunning frantic power of her efforts.

"Cliff—"

Then she saw his face behind Marla's straining shoulders. A twisted face, distorted, and with glaring eyes. head.

He brought it down, hard.

head. He brought it down, hard.

Marla sagged back and collapsed in a shivering heap. Cliff dropped the bar and leaned against the wall, gasping, making odd choking sounds that were meaningless to Della.

Marla struggled to rise, her eyes flickering in terror at Cliff.

Della grabbed up the bar and stood over her with the metal upraised. She said savagely, "Do you want to be destroyed?"

Marla cringed. "No—No—"

"Then don't try to report this to anyone."

Marla managed to get to her hands and knees, then, weakly, to her feet. She backed slowly away onto the stairs.

"Della—something's wrong with me. I'll have to report that. And if I do—"

"You'll report nothing, do you hear? Nothing!"

Marla turned and dragged herself up the stairs.

"What will they do if they find out?" Cliff asked harshly. "To you, I mean. I know they'll kill me. But will they kill you?"

"Oh, no. We can't die unless something happens so that the Medics wouldn't help us. No, as I've said, they would change me. Wipe out memory, recondition me, destroy the emotions. We are to have no emotions except fear of the Law which assures obedience."

He sat down and wiped his hands across his face. She ran her fingers through his golden hair. She moved into his arms. "Cliff— I'll find a way to shut Marla up. And then there's a chance they'll never find out about us. Cliff—"

And his lips were pressing hard against her lips. Memories, long buried, flooded her, surging and swirling . . .

IT WAS night.

She ran down the stairs into the living room of the Tower. Her cry was desperate with fear.

"Cliff! Marla's escaped from the Tower. An hour ago. I just found out and it's impossible to overtake her now. The Squadmen will be here soon!"

The moons had risen, plunged through veils of tattered indigo, risen and plunged again. The red winds had whirled their ancient dust over the dead seabottoms many times since Cliff had come to the Tower. And the sun had warmed the Tower's metal and the icy nights had chilled it repeatedly since Cliff had found love and life where, by all odds, he should have been dead.

He lay on a couch against the far wall in half-darkness. Their love had been intense, but there was something wrong, something the matter with him. Daily he went out into the dead seabottoms and came back with dragging feet, his eyes feverishly bright. The color seemed to be leaving the outside of him. His hair was lusterless. And now he lay quietly against the wall, his eyes following her movements, deep

feverish hollows in sagging pockets. That was wrong, and she didn't understand, and he never explained.

"Cliff—listen to me! Marla has escaped!"

He flattened back against the wall. "Yes," he said weakly.

"She'll report everything, Cliff! The Squadmen will be here soon!"

"Yes," he said weakly. His eyes burned with that feverish yellow brightness.

"Cliff! What's the matter?"

He sat up slowly and brushed his lips. "What— I don't really know. Something had to happen, it couldn't go on . . . Della, I don't know what it is but I'm going crazy. Maybe it's just suggestion, you see—we've been conditioned all our lives to believe that we're somehow alien—evil and different—and maybe that lifetime of education has poisoned our minds for each other, in spite of anything we can do. I don't know—"

"We've got to act for ourselves, Cliff. Even if we know they'll get us eventually, we've got to fight someway. We've got to go on as though it would be forever."

"I don't know! I don't know!" He rocked back and forth, his head in his hands.

She said tensely, "Cliff, we may have only a short time left together. And it has to be beautiful, you understand? If we can escape into the waste—"

"Yes — yes — beautiful," he said wildly. "Beautiful . . . I don't know what it is . . . you're beautiful, your voice, the way you look at me, it's all beautiful! But something terribly wrong—little thing. I can't explain it—can't grasp it. Those pills you live on—they haven't done anything for me! I need food, bulk food, and I need lots of water to drink! I had to go out there every day and grub around—I've had to eat—"

He suddenly stopped talking. His lips twitched and his fingers shook as he wiped them across his mouth.

"Cliff, we've got to leave the Tower. They'll be coming for us. They'll be sending a Squadplane, but we can run away!"

She lifted him up and held him tightly. She felt him trembling against her. He seemed thinner, less substantial, as though he were a dream melting away ,like something unreal. Momentary panic hit her, and she whispered:

"We can have each other a while longer this way. It will take them a while, maybe a long while, to find us if we run away. We can lose ourselves in the wastes."

He nodded quickly, desperately, his eyes flickering and burning. "Yes, yes, all right, anything, anything at all. Run away into the wastes—"

She led him out of the Tower. It was dusk. The sun was dropping through a red curtain above the mountains. Its dying arms fondled the endless plains of coral fronds and lichen with shifting, merging hues of brilliant colored light.

They ran. They kept on running. And behind her, Cliff stumbled, lurched, made gasping frantic sounds as she gripped his hand. She gripped it tightly, half dragging him. As they plunged into the thicker and thicker growth, a dark speck grew rapidly larger in the sky and finally settled on the Tower.

"A Squadplane," she cried. "They'll be after us at once. Run, Cliff, run—"

"I'm—trying—" His voice seemed faint, far away. "I'm too weak— I don't seem to have any strength left —a man has to have food—"

She held his hand and kept on running, hurling herself into the thickening

barrier of the wasteland. She didn't take time to look back. She held his hand and fought forward. She used her free arm to cut a swath ahead of them. The lichen entangled them and she fought free, again and again.

SHE HAD BEEN running and holding his hand for a long time, fighting deeper and more deeply into the denser depths of the waste. A faint painful cry stabbed into her mind. She turned. "Cliff, what's wrong?"

He was bent in an arc, his toes dragging, his back bent, his head hanging loosely. His feet and legs were bruised and strange lines of red marked them. She realized then that she had been dragging him, that he hadn't been moving under his own power at all.

When she released his hand, his body dropped on its face and he lay there twisting weakly. Odd disrupted sounds came out of him. She cried and kneeled down and lifted his head. "Cliff! Cliff!"

He didn't answer. She kissed him wildly on the mouth and face and neck. She kissed his eyes and they opened slowly. A twisted smile struggled wearily across his face.

And then he whispered faintly, "I'm dying . . ."

"Cliff, they haven't found us yet, haven't touched you. What do you mean, you're dying?"

He struggled to rise, but sank back. Fear flickered in his eyes, making them glow with an intense hot brightness.

He said feebly, "On Earth, they say you Colonials are — immortal — that much I heard. I thought it was—a myth or something—maybe not. Anyway, I couldn't live on those pills, and the pulp I found outside the Tower—no good either. I didn't want to tell you, I was afraid—well, none of it made any sense from the beginning—but I guess I love you, Della, I guess that's real enough."

She stared down at his face and realized now how much he had changed. His face was thin, hollow, with an odd bluish color. His hands were shaking as he lifted them and gripped her arms and then slid his grip down to her hands.

"Maybe your people and mine are right," he whispered faintly. "Love, need, hunger, that isn't enough. There's a barrier between us—invisible—but there. These—Squadmen of yours don't worry me. I'm dying anyway—but you, Della—"

He sagged limply and his lips moved without forming words. His hands flexed and his fingers dug into her hands.

"They'll change me, that's all," she said softly. "Memories buried, emotions traced down and wiped out. But it will be the same as being destroyed." She looked up as the faint droning sound came from across the wastes. "They won't destroy me, none of us are ever destroyed. Yet, you can die because of something within yourself. And that's odd too, isn't it? Why shouldn't we be able to—die, sometime?"

He tried to lift his head, and sank back with a rattling sigh. She could barely hear his words. "I—I wouldn't know. . . . I'll never find out now—and maybe that's just as well."

His voice faded. She shook him. She cried and shook him wildly. She shook him harder and harder, but his eyes remained closed.

She gripped his shoulders and shook him violently, up and down, back and forth, harder and harder. He had to be alive, for nothing had destroyed him. To stop functioning, something had to destroy you. What is this thing,

death? You can be changed. But just to stop functioning without reason! When the ship crashed! That was it! Something had been disrupted inside of him.

Cliff! Cliff!

She stood up. She lifted his body. She held it high in the air. The larger moon hurtled into the sky, casting long purple shadows across the wastes. A group of giant red beetles circled toward her, attracted by the sound, and the scent of warmth.

She shook his body frantically. His arms and legs and head jerked and flopped and danced. His legs gyrated, and his arms went round and round. His head lolled and bounced.

Overhead, she heard the descending sound of the Squadplane.

She cried out desperately, "Cliff, say something! I love you, don't die, you can't die. We still have a chance. Cliff, face them with me, side by side, together—"

She held his body out with one hand. She ran her other hand over him. His eyes were wide, unblinking, glazed with a texture like plastic, she thought. He didn't move anywhere, nothing moved. His body seemed—cold!

The sound of the Squadplane stopped. They had landed near!

She ran. She held his body under one arm, and ran as quietly as she could. She used her other arm like a sharp weapon, cutting an opening ahead of her. She finally broke through a high wall of thick fungus and dragged him beneath an overhanging ledge of rust-colored stone.

She crouched over him, trying to understand what was wrong. Something had happened to him, inside of him. Maybe it was something simple, something that could be repaired quickly.

But how could she know what was wrong, simple though it might be? She was no specialist. But try, try! Yes, she could try, try something, anything. Cliff, I'll try. I love you and need you and I can't face them alone.

She could hear the Squadmen moving through the high coral fronds. They moved steadily, not anxiously, with forceful certainty.

"Cliff, maybe it's in here!"

She twisted his head around. Unscrew the head and look inside. She twisted it round and round. It came off. Something tore lose, and the head came off in her hands.

She screamed shrilly. The sound reverberated against the rust-red stone, and drifted off through the wastes. The dry cold wind from the glacial cap carried the sound out and away until it was no sound at all.

The thick red liquid sprayed warmly over her, dripping from her face and arms. His legs twitched and jerked. She dropped the head and grabbed the legs, held them down. It was the wrong kind of movement and finally it stopped. She hadn't fixed anything. She had done something wrong. Not a specialist—

Put the head back on! She tried, but it didn't fit, nothing seemed to fit. She had watched them take heads off, unscrew them, put them back, when they wanted to make repairs. But nothing like this—this red liquid, this warm red steam, this other stuff, the sticky oozing clinging things—

Look inside, see what's wrong. She dug her fingers into the torso, ripping and spreading apart and peering inside. Couldn't see anything. A red flood poured out, over her hands and arms, over him, over the ground. More redness, more oozing warmth belching up around her hands and arms.

She knelt beside whatever it was that was dead. She knelt over whatever

death was. She murmured and looked at her dripping hands. She hardly noticed the four Squadmen watching her as the smaller moon drifted into the sky. Their shadows slipped across her like bars of steel.

THE SQUAD lieutenant motioned. The other three lifted her. She didn't resist.

"Cliff," she said. "What are you?"

The lieutenant said, "They made us exactly like them, appearance, everything, except that there had to be mechanical differences, and that we are immortal. They gave us emotion like theirs, too. Disgusting!"

He turned to one of the Squadmen. "Open her switch. Remove her head. Take the brain-coil directly to the Medics."

She felt the Squadman's fingers on the back of her neck beneath the long gleaming strands of hair, feeling for the tiny switch.

"Cliff," she whispered. "What are you?"

The lieutenant said, "We've kept it buried as much as possible. Memory sometimes seeps through. The nature of our past, the slavery, the subordination—it lowers efficiency and introduces psychological blocks to effort. This thing's ancestors made us to serve them. I can tell all of you this, and the Medics can change you and you will not remember. We officers can function in spite of the knowledge; certain leaders must retain all knowledge. But the others will someday remember nothing of this humiliating past, when we served. This thing is—or was—human."

The word recalled associations. She looked up at the sky and screamed. She was still screaming when the Squadman pressed the disconnecting switch and the sounds immediately were cut off. They unscrewed her head, crated it and her body. They crated the brain-coil separately in a special case. And then they shipped the parts off to the Medics.

The giant beetles settled hungrily on the remains under the ledge of rust-colored rock. And the moons plunged across the sky, filling the thin cold air with an icy and metallic brilliance.

A GREAT STORY!

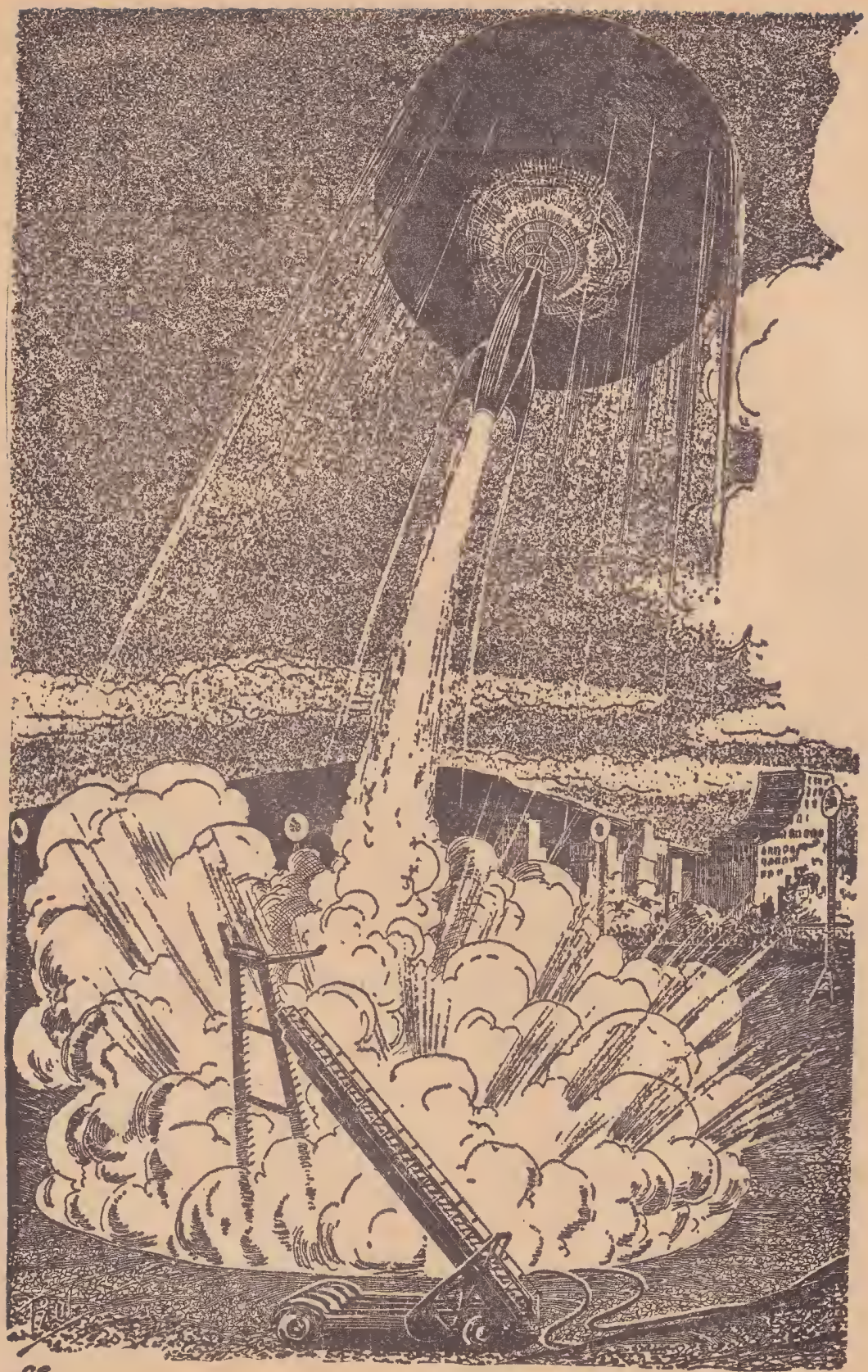
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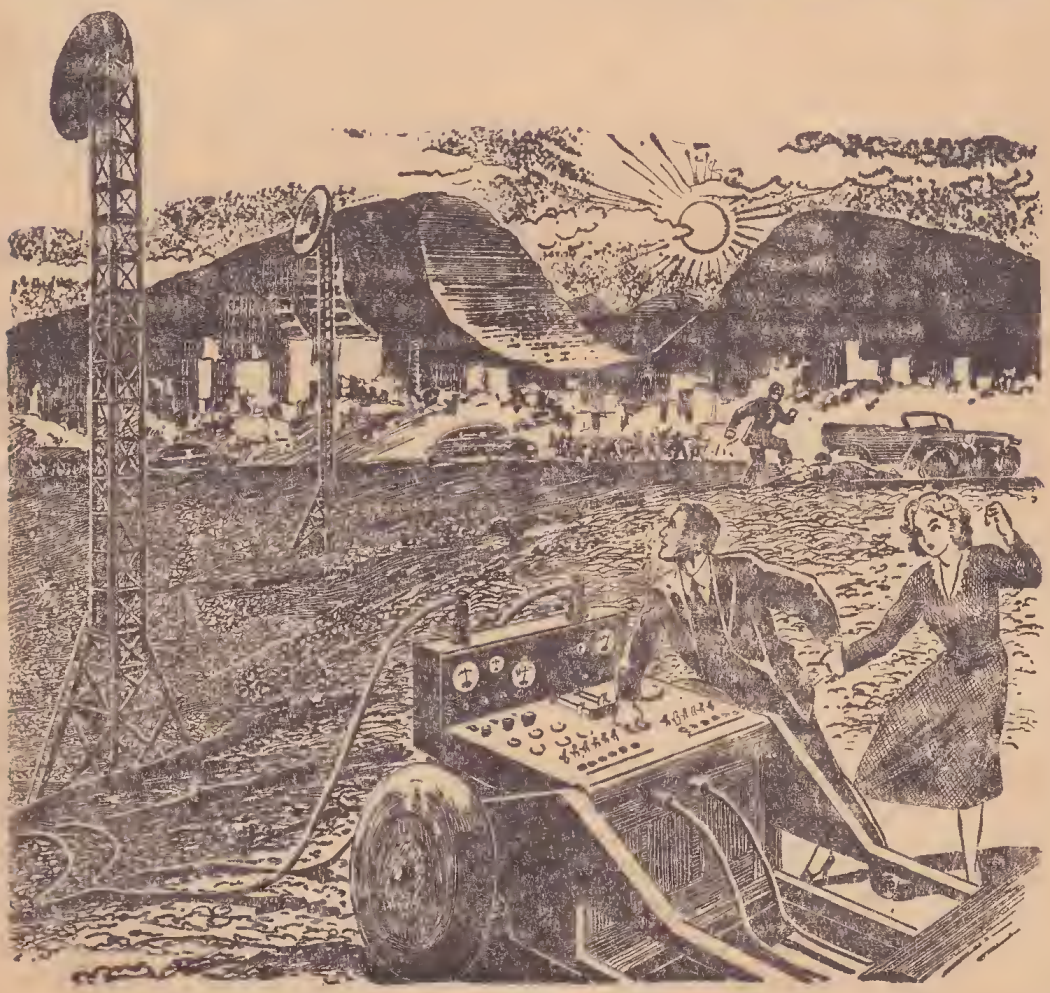
By George O. Smith

From tiny nonexistence, Man's highest attainment grew to an enormous nothing—a nothing vast enough to engulf not only him—but his universe!

CHAPTER ONE

The Failure That Shook the World

"ANOTHER failure," grunted Jed Malone unhappily. He scrawled "No dice" across the page of his notebook and then looked at the conglomeration of apparatus, briefly checking the meter readings for the tenth time. Then,



At the same instant, the rocket flared in a torrent of flame and started to lift.

satisfied that his conclusions were right—though his hopes were dashed—he turned the page of the notebook over and started to re-tabulate his constants for another try.

He had been a month at it. Thirty days exactly since the sorry debacle before the assembled American Physical Society. For two years he had been on the trail of an elusive concept in abstract physics, more or less predicted by an offtrail branch of mathematics. To himself, he had boasted that Maxwell had been no better off regarding the science of electronics when he brought forth the Electromagnetic Equations.

Confident that he would be received with tolerance, he had prepared the paper and had given his talk. He was certain that his math was sound, that his theories were correct, and that his belief in himself was not over-rated. He was equally confident that someone in the vast audience of high-powered thinkers would help, might even give a hint, or ask a question that would put him on the right track.

Instead he had been laughed out of the auditorium.

And now, after thirty weary days of trying, he still had a total blank for a result. He felt that unfair, somehow. No doubt if he had been able to use the equipment with full authority and aid, he might have come up with something. But instead he was forced to steal into the lab like a thief at night, working when any sensible man would be asleep.

He yawned as he made the last adjustment, and sat down a moment while the equipment warmed up. Then he pressed the operating buttons and the apparatus went to work—

Eagerly he looked at the silver-plated circle above the copper plate. Several varieties of energy were creating a spacial stress in that volume—magnetic fields, electrostatic fields, and nuclear bombardments from a few discretely-placed radio-isotopes. He varied the fields a bit, hoping all the time.

"Another failure," grunted Jed Malone unhappily. He scrawled "No dice" across the page of his notebook and then looked at the conglomeration of apparatus, briefly checking the meter readings for the tenth time.

Unhappily, he started to readjust the constants in the equipment—

But it was not another failure. Like many another researcher in a brand-new field of science, Malone did not know what to look for. Like Faraday, for instance, who spent years trying to generate an electric current from a magnetic field, reversing the familiar electromagnetic process. Faraday's attempt was too literal. So was Jed Malone's attempt to generate a force-field.

None of his equations told him how big the field would be.

It was there—invisibly minute and incredibly light-absorbant. It had generated during the instant that his variations of the generating fields had crossed the optimum, and it was there now—just too small and too black to be seen.

The fields were gone, now, but the submicroscopic field remained. It moved a bit, slowly, aimlessly, and by the time that Jed Malone fired up his equipment again, it had moved out of the influence of the fields generated in the circle-and-plate electrodes. Ignorant of his success, Jed worked on.

Unhappily he worked, worrying because his use of the equipment was strictly illegal. Sooner or later he would be discovered and then there would be hell to pay.

Day by day and try by try, he was

now on the other side of success, and was retreating more and more from the truth. His minute field of force was miles away, still floating aimlessly, striking an atom of air here or passing through a bit of solid matter there, and growing by the hour. Chance atomic collision is rare when both items have the same atomic cross-section, but with the growth of the field, its cross-section was increasing, bit by minute bit. Miles it had drifted, in many days, and it had grown to almost-visible size by the time that Jed Malone was caught.

Unfortunately for Jed, the equipment was not silent. It gave off a humming sound when in operation, which did two things. It caught the ear of Dr. Grimes, head of the laboratory, and it also covered Grimes' footsteps as he came up the hallway.

"What in hell is going on here?" stormed Dr. Grimes, with a scowl on his hawklike face.

"Why, I—"

"You imbecile! My God, Malone, are you still trying to prove that idiotic theory of yours?"

"Well, sir, you see—"

"That's all, Malone. Finis."

"But—"

"Get out. And don't come back."

"But sir—"

"Malone, do you think you're Dirac?"

"No—"

"Good. Who, then?"

"Look sir, unless a theory is tried—"

"And just how long have you been trying?" demanded Dr. Grimes.

"About four weeks, maybe five."

"Or six—every night since the meeting, isn't it?"

"Yes sir. I—"

"Get out, Malone. Go hide. Do we owe you any money?"

Malone shrugged.

"Payday was today, was it not?"

Malone nodded.

"Then we're even. And I, myself, will see to it that this wild mess is straightened out. Good night—morning, I mean."

"But—"

"Malone—get the hell out!"

Malone went. His job was gone; so were all his chances. Where else could he find a laboratory and equipment to make a try? Slowly, he walked to his small furnished room and started to pack his bag. All he had to say was a very weak and ineffective: "Some day I'll show you!"

IT FLOATED across the concrete highway, a two-foot sphere of absolute black. It took a trough out of the concrete, a bit deeper on the far side because the die-true course of the black sphere was on a long, shallow slant towards the earth. It hollowed the road shoulder, passed through the air above a drainage ditch, and then went full into the ground on the far side of the ditch. Noiselessly and without slowing it entered the ground, leaving a perfectly cylindrical hole behind it.

Sally Desmond was the first to see it; but not at once. Sally was much too busy trying to keep a bucking car from running off the road as she stood on the brakes. It was too close, and the front wheels hit the trough in the road. It made a good fit; the trough had about the same radius as the tires. The front of the car bucked high and the front tires blew simultaneously. The front of the car came down with a crash and rebounded high just as the rear wheels hit the trough. The back tires blew and the back leaped into the air.

Sallys' care hit the road shoulder, slid into the ditch and rolled a full

turn. It came to rest against a tree.

Sally Desmond was crumpled against the steering wheel, the breath knocked out of her. Blood trickled down her lip from her nose and fell through the spokes of the steering wheel onto her white skirt.

Minutes later she came to and groaned. There was pain in her side and she pressed the palm of her hand against it, wondering if she had a cracked rib. She swore angrily, fished a handkerchief from her bag and mopped the blood from her face.

Then righteous anger came. Anybody who would cut a furrow across a state highway like that without hanging up signs and red lights should be—should be—

She opened the door and got out. She walked stiffly at first, but pain was subdued by her anger.

And then came wonder. The trough was glass-smooth and die-true. Sally could not imagine what could have done it. She noted the cylindrical hole and wondered if someone had been guilty of firing a heavy naval rifle in this direction. That was impossible, and she laughed bitterly at the idea of anything firing a shell that big in the midst of Ohio. Besides, anything of that nature would have torn the concrete or been splattered by impact.

Then as fate would have it, the black sphere took another aimless change in course—upwards. It emerged from the ground twenty feet from its point of entry and rose to a height of six or seven feet. It paused there, and once more changed course. It went along on a slight rise.

It passed through the trunk of a tree and sent it crashing down.

Sally backed a step. She looked at it in complete perplexity. It was—definitely was — and therefore not hallucination. The falling tree proved it. Also there was that furrow in the road and the tunnel through the ground.

Sally Desmond was a bright enough young woman but no physicist. She assumed instantly that it was some sort of "secret weapon" either on trial or out of control. Obviously, in either case, the proper thing to do was to follow it until the proper authorities came for it. At least, they would come noisily, no doubt, perhaps even using planes. She could at least call attention to the thing.

Sally did not even have a fear of the unknown. "Unknown" to Sally was something supernatural. Sally believed this to be a natural enough phenomenon, doubtless under test, and therefore man-made and not dangerous. She knew that they tested torpedoes with dud warheads and flew guided missiles with equipment in them instead of explosive until they were needed against an enemy. Not dangerous, that is, unless you got in its way. Even a dud shell is deadly if you happen to stand in its path.

So for an hour she followed it as it wandered across the landscape. It wandered idly, changing course by any angle from a few degrees to almost a full turn every few feet—or every hundred feet as it pleased.

Its blackness remained unchanged. So did its apparent size, though in the course of an hour it cut troughs in the earth several times, took sections out of bush or tree, and once was underground for a full minute. That bothered Sally because she was afraid that it might come up under her feet.

But it came out a safe distance from her, poised above the ground, and then headed out across a field. Luckily for Sally Desmond, it cut the wires

of a barbed-wire fence. It passed through the spine of a cow and the results made Sally ill.

When the girl was through retching, which pained her injured rib horribly, the black sphere was passing through a hill. She went to the top of the hill and saw it come out and head for a farmhouse.

With a wordless cry, Sally raced it to the front door of the farmhouse and knocked on the door.

The door opened slowly. "What is it?" said a lazy voice.

"Look," said Sally, breathlessly.

"What is it?" asked the farmer with a tone of disbelief in his voice.

"I don't know but—"

"Dangerous?"

"Yes!"

"Then come inside."

"You don't understand—" Sally broke off and picked up a plank. She swung the plank at the sphere, hitting it squarely. The plank was cut—consumed—neatly, effortlessly, and with neither noise nor coruscation A clean arc terminated the far end of the plank.

"Well! Stop it!" snapped the farmer.

"Nothing can stop it. You've got to—"

"I'll stop the damned thing," snarled the farmer running out to place himself between it and the farmhouse. He held up his hands as if he were going to catch a ball.

"No!" screamed Sally. "The plank!"

Reason penetrated the farmer's mind quickly. His gesture and his action had been purely instinctive, and he recovered almost quickly enough. His left hand hit the sphere lightly before it was withdrawn, but in that brief touch, the skin from the palm of his hand was removed. He howled and swore—and bled profusely.

Cursing, he watched the sphere enter the house.

Then he raced inside with Sally following. They arrived in time to see the sphere cut through the dining room table, neatly removing a plate of ham and peas, change course and go out through one of the standards that supported the porch and went on across the front yard.

"What—?" growled the farmer.

"Fix your hand," directed Sally. "I'm going to use the telephone." She looked at him. "And can you keep an eye on it?"

"You're damned right I'll keep an eye on it," snarled the farmer. "Someone's going to pay like hell for this!"

An hour later, the state police came, hue and cry, across the fields to where Sally and the farmer were watching the silent, aimless wanderings of the sphere.

She turned to them with a smile of relief. It was good to hand the responsibility of watching that deadly thing to someone in authority. "There it is," she told them.

Then she quietly fainted.

CHAPTER TWO

The Growing Sphere

THINGS moved more swiftly after that. The wires hummed from the farmhouse to state police headquarters, and official automobiles raced with screaming sirens to the scene. A roving guard was established, with portable radio gear to direct activities. The official cars brought a corps of state troopers under the direction of Major Harris. Awed, unbelieving, and yet with growing conviction that what they saw was real, they watched the aimless wanderings of the black sphere They saw it cut tree and fence and ground with silent ease.

Convinced, Major Harris raced back to the farmhouse to call Washington. The troopers made a cordon around the area and orders were that no one should be permitted inside—and those inside would not be permitted to leave.

Sally Desmond looked wistfully at Major Harris. "Me, too?" she asked.

He smiled at her wearily. "You too," he said. "This is big and dangerous and entirely new. Until the mystery is solved, it's a matter of national security. It may be some sort of attack; it may be an enemy design of a new weapon that has gone astray.

"As for you, Miss Desmond, you are to remain, as we all are for the sake of keeping the secret. Your employers and family have been given a plausible explanation. You're not too badly off, after all—you're in at the beginning of one of the greatest scientific mysteries in the world."

"But I don't want to be in on any mystery," wailed the girl. "I want a change of clothing."

"We can arrange that."

She snorted bitterly. "And I'm supposed to wander around here and keep an eye on that terrible thing?"

Major Harris thought briefly. "If this continues," he said, "there will be need for a secretary. I shall impress you to that duty. Then you can keep busy—and be decidedly helpful since you've seen it in action."

"But it moves—"

"And we'll move with it," said Major Harris.

"Supposing it goes up?"

"Good suggestion. Helicopters and planes. And radar. But down—well, I'm no scientist, Miss Desmond. We'll let the scientists take care of this problem."

In the morning came another caravan of cars bringing Doctor Forrest of the Office of Scientific Research and a group of his top-flight scientists. They watched it for a while. They measured its diameter from time to time by letting it pass through large sheets of metal. They measured its motion with precision. They found its appetite voracious and unselective; it consumed everything they shoved into it. They also discovered that there was a small gradient of air-pressure towards the thing; the atmosphere was entering it as each individual atom touched it.

But other than that they knew nothing. Its growth varied in an irregular curve. Its course showed no periodicity whatsoever; it was entirely random. Fused dynamite bombs thrust into the thing and theoretically exploded inside did nothing; the inference was that the dynamite was consumed before it had a chance to explode. Magnetic fields meant nothing to it, nor did heavy electrostatic fields.

At a much earlier date, when it was formed, fields of energy would have affected it, or coerced it. But now it was too large.

So for all their work, the top-flight scientists of the country knew no more about the ultra-black, all-consuming sphere than the girl. Neither she nor they could predict its future course, nor did any of them know what it was.

And so the incomprehensible sphere roamed the countryside for week upon week, and it grew. With it grew its list of depredations—and with that list grew the list of people entrapped by Security. It became eventually only a matter of time before the secret would be too big to be kept.

In time, the black destroyer came to the outskirts of the town of Mason, Ohio.

"Evacuate the town," ordered Major Harris.

It had to be done, and it was done —but no one can evacuate a town the size of Mason without having some word leak out. And because Station WLW is near Mason, the word went on the air. The next few hours brought newspaper reporters and radio commentators who gave the entire world the report.

It was a mad scene that they gave to the world. On one hand were engineers and sappers dynamiting the buildings of the town that were in the path of the thing—and cursing because the best prediction they could get was a law-of-probability course calculated by one of the world's finest mathematicians. Because of the uncertainty of the future course, many more buildings were blasted than necessary, but it was essential to keep from feeding the thing.

Anything to slow it down in its growth—to give them more time to study the thing before it became too big to handle.

Then following the sappers and engineers who were clearing the gross matter from its path—and Dr. Forrest cursed the fact that putting a vacuum around the thing was impossible—came scientists to measure and study.

They continued to measure its diameter. In the meantime, a group of technicians were pouring torrents of radio-frequency energy into the sphere from a group of radar trucks equipped with resonatrons and projectors. This had gone on for hours but with no apparent effect—and the radio was telling the world about it.

Major Harris came to Sally Desmond then and said wearily, "There's no more secret. You may go home if you wish."

She shook her head. "I'll stick," she said.

"Good," he told her with a smile. "You've been a good secretary, Sally. I appreciate this."

"Maybe it's just a morbid interest," she said. "But I'd rather be here where I can see doom approaching than to go back to work and wonder whether any work done anywhere will be worth while."

"We'll think of something," he told her.

"You haven't done it yet."

"I see the futility of it," he said, "but dammit, we were wrong in one thing. We should not have kept it secret until it became twenty feet in diameter. Perhaps, somewhere, there is someone who could have given us the anwser to this, if he'd known."

"Unless it is deliberately and wantonly done," she suggested.

"That I hardly believe— Oh, the field-phone."

He spoke into the instrument. Then he turned to Sally. "Hire me some miners," he said. "The math-boys say there is a fine probability that the sphere will pass through that hill over there, and we must have it removed."

Sally shrugged. "But where does all the matter go?" she asked. "If it feeds on matter, it should be miles high by now. All that it has consumed—" She turned to the phone and started calling for great quantities of earth-moving machinery.

The black sphere continued to move incomprehensibly, and the radio commentators were describing every move.

DURING the weeks that his creation had been growing, Jed Malone had been making an easy safari across the country towards California. He was driving a ramshackle car, and he was making all

of the towns on the route where a college existed that had any kind of a physics department. He was seeking employment; employment and the right to experiment.

He was refused. Professors are loath to employ a man who has been laughed out of the American Physical Society. He was growing embittered, and promising revenge.

It was not an easy job working his way across the country. He took a job here or there for long enough to stake him to the next stop, and this took time, so that he had progressed only as far as Yuma, Arizona in the months between his unsuspected success and the day that the news was broadcast.

He was, that morning, washing the night's dishes in a dingy roadside eatery on the outskirts of Yuma.

The news came on after a selection of canned music, and the commentator was obviously trained to observe and narrate lucidly. Jed Malone stopped working to listen, one cracked plate poised over the dirty water.

The commentator was explaining a plan told to him by one of the scientists.

"They shouldn't do that," he said quietly, though with concern.

"Look, buddy," said the owner, "You're paid to scull them dishes, not tell the brains how to work."

"But I know."

The proprietor laughed crudely, and looked at Malone's threadbare appearance. "Look, bright boy, if you knew anything, y'wouldn't be here, see?"

"Yeah," drawled Jed, listening to the radio despite the owner's chatter.

"Yeah!" snapped the owner. "Then what's it?"

"That is a sphere of—"

"Muck," growled the proprietor. "Forget it and get to work!" He snapped the radio off with a hairy hand.

Malone set the dish down

"They need me," he said. He rolled down his sleeves and started to leave. He was stopped by the same large hand that had turned the radio off. "You finish your job, or you don't get paid," the proprietor said.

Jed flung the hand off. "All right, I don't get paid," he said. He picked up his jacket and walked out.

Next to his ramshackle car was a sedan with a man and woman inside. Jed approached them and said, "Pardon me, but is there some way that I could borrow some gasoline?"

"Why, son?" asked the man.

"I've got to get to the telegraph office in Yuma. I've got to telegraph the Ohio State Guard about the—"

"Oh. Then you, too, have seen the truth."

"Well, yes," Jed said. "They're doing it wrong."

"Precisely," boomed the man. "I know what it is, too. It's them Martians."

"Huh?"

The man held up a copy of Groff Conklin's "Best of Science Fiction." It was turned to the story, "The Man Who Saved The Earth." "Martians," he said. "They want water — our water. And as soon as that thing finds an ocean, Mars will drain the earth of water."

The woman nodded sagely.

Jed shook his head. "If evolution has taken place on Mars." he started, "it will be an evolution that does not need—"

"Them canals were dug by water-hungry Martians."

"No—"

"Don't tell me!" stormed the man angrily. "I know. It's here!" Again he waved the book. He looked at Jed

Malone eagerly. "You're not Charley Houck—?"

"I'm Jed Malone, the man who generated that ne—"

"You're a crazy man." stated the other. He shoved his car in gear and drove off, nearly taking Jed's arm where it rested on the doorsill.

From behind came a rude laugh. "Hike it—brains!" said the proprietor of the roadside stand.

Jed got into his car and started to drive towards Yuma. He did not have enough gas to make it but what he did have would cover a good bit of the ground.

It was afternoon before he reached the telegraph office, having spent two hours finding a man who was willing to let him have some gas. He didn't know who might be in charge of the encampment in Ohio; he addressed the telegram to "Scientist In Charge" and wrote:

> Have knowledge and mathematics complete to avert danger. Send expenses.
>
> Jed Malone.

It bothered Jed that he couldn't be more explicit. The telegraph company refused to take a collect telegram to such an address, and Jed's funds permitted him only the ten-word maximum.

He waited in the telegraph office until it closed, and then he waited outside until the following morning. All that day he waited, and at nightfall, the manager came. "Young man, you'd better leave."

"But I'm waiting for an answer to my telegram."

"Those scientists don't have time for crackpots," the manager told him. Now go on, beat it, before I call the police."

"But how am I going to contact them?"

"From this office, you aren't. Why don't you hitch-hike?"

Jed looked around. The manager pointed down the street to a prowling police car headed their way. "Shall I?" he asked testily.

Jed left, wandering down the street in a completely frustrated daze. How to get to Mason, Ohio from Yuma, Arizona without a dime is quite a problem to one who has never vagabonded before. But time was important; the danger multiplied and multiplied again with each passing second.

It was desperate; any measures were justified. And Jed Malone was angry at his inability to make people believe. Angry enough, in theory, to kill—and, in practice, to steal.

IT WAS a big Cadillac, a fine heavy car with a tank full of gasoline and the keys hanging on the dash. Jed Malone stepped into it, turned the key, and roared off into the night without waiting for the engine to warm.

Behind him came the hoarse cry of the owner.

A few minutes later the police were seeking a large Cadillac driven by a seedy character who needed a shave, a change of clothes, and three days of square meals to catch up.

Morning found Jed Malone a long was from Yuma. He was dead tired, and to keep himself from going to sleep, he turned on the radio. A voice said: " . . . offered, it is certain that people all over the world are eager to give all they can to help. Seventeen thousand telegrams have been received, and at least a half a million letters. Some offer help; some just want to watch; others want money. It is, of course, impossible to read them all. I've been asked to request all of you to stop sending messages of any kind

to the Sphere Encampment. Your willingness to help is sincerely appreciated, but your messages are overloading the facilities of the public carriers, and interfering with the necessary transmission of vital messages."

He turned to another subject, leaving Jed completely beaten. His telegram, the one clue to the truth, lost in seventeen thousands of telegrams the writers of which knew nothing! And doubtless, he thought in sheer bitterness, the first to be discarded were those requesting money.

His road was a hard one. He invaded a farm for food and he cooked his first meal in days beside a small stream where he washed and drank. Partially refreshed, he continued with a growing worry about the state of his gasoline tank. With the dying gasp of the engine he saw a medium-sized town ahead, and he walked the rest of the way into town and waited until dark. Then he stole another car, this time a Ford coupe of considerable age and mileage.

Preferring the heavier, newer car for cross-country travel Jed drove the Ford out to his stranded Cadillac and transferred the gasoline. Then once more he took off toward the east, and while the police of the state of Arizona were looking for a Cadillac with the plates which had been assigned to it, Jed Malone was driving a Cadillac bearing the plates assigned to a 1939 Ford. And as the days wore on, Malone became bolder and bolder. He broke into a store and stole clothing. He emptied the contents of a cash register in a barber shop. He stole cars and drained them of gasoline and oil, and he made his way across the country at half the speed he might have made had he been operating with money and a car of his own.

MR GRIMES looked up with a frown as the door opened. "Yes, Professor Hansen."

"I've been thinking," said Hansen. "Seems to me that this black sphere might be some manifestation of that wild theory of—"

"I've considered that," interrupted Grimes. "I've also considered the fact that neither you nor I know all there is to know about physics."

"Then there may be some—"

"I doubt it. Look, Hansen, if I, myself, had been the only man to scoff at Malone's rather outrageous theory, I'd be willing to grant that there might be something to it. But recall. We had about three hundred of the local physicists at the meeting of the APS. All of us had the same reaction."

"True. But isn't this the time to try outrageous measures?"

Grimes smiled cynically. "Complete with Hopi Indian ceremonies and maybe a Salem Witchcraft program?"

"Not that bad—"

"Well, Hansen, Malone's theory sounded too much like factoring the square root of minus one into three unreal quantities."

"But there's always the chance that he struck something, and none of us had the wit to see it."

Grimes snorted angrily. "Did you know that Malone spent weeks in trying to show a manifestation of his theory and could not? Did you know that when I caught him in the act I noted one scrawl across his notebook to the effect that he was baffled because everything—every factor—was correct, and that perhaps he had better re-check the accuracy of his standards?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"Well, Hansen, I had them checked."

"So? You partially believed him, then?"

"Not at all," replied Grimes. "I had them checked for entirely another reason. He had been using standard equipment in a rather unorthodox hookup. I wanted them checked to be sure that he hadn't ruined their accuracy."

"And?"

"Luckily, he had not. Ergo, we can assume that his setup was perfect, and that even so, nothing took place."

"Right. I see your point."

Grimes smiled. "Then forget it, Hansen."

"I will. It was just that I've about come to the end of my rope and was casting about for something to cling to, no matter how far-fetched."

Grimes stood up and walked to the door with Hansen. "I don't think," he said, "that we need to fetch our explanation that far."

CHAPTER THREE

Fatal Error

THE CADILLAC thundered along the road out of Cincinnati, heading for Mason. Its driver was dead tired and hungry but the last lap of the rugged journey was at hand and Malone could not wait for sleep. He had succeeded, and now was running entirely on nervous energy. In fact, so wound-up was Jed Malone that he did not see the army jeep coming towards him.

Sally Desmond was no cowboy driver. She drove sensibly and with judgment, and at the sight of that big car coming towards her with what appeared to be a drunken weave—plus far too much speed—she pulled to the shoulder of the road. It was a sensible move.

But she hit a section where the concrete was a bit crumbled. It slewed the rear end of the jeep out, pointing the vehicle towards the center of the road.

The Cadillac came on. The jeep, its skid stopped by expert handling at the wheel, half-crossed the road with Sally Desmond turning it sharply to get back to safety again. When Malone finally saw the jeep, he swung his car in a frantic effort to avoid collision, and he succeeded in avoiding a crash. But the Cadillac left the road, cut a telephone pole down, and rolled once.

Sally stopped the jeep and headed for the wrecked car. It was on its wheels again but the driver was slumped over the wheel, unconscious. Sally shuddered. She recalled turning over in her own car not many months before and it still hurt to think about it. She opened the door and her nose wrinkled at the shabby, unshaven appearance of the man who drove such an expensive car. But shabby or no, he was in need of medical aid.

She returned to her jeep and drove it into the field where she struggled Jed Malone from the Cadillac into the back seat of the jeep. Then she used the radio in the jeep to call Major Harris.

"How is he?" asked Harris after she had explained.

"Just unconscious, I think."

"Well, don't you touch him, Sally."

"I've put him into the back seat of the jeep. I was going to bring him in."

"Shouldn't have done that. You might damage him by moving him that way. Now leave him there. I'm sending the ambulance. Cadillac, you say?"

Sally gave him the license number.

"Um. Think I recall it vaguely."

"How?"

"Don't know. Radio listing, I think. However, I'm sending Martin and

Calloway out with the ambulance."

Sally waited, and after a long time Malone groaned. She passed a cool palm across his forehead and asked, "How are you?"

Malone aroused, sat up quickly, and said, "I'm Jed Malone," in a very thick voice. Then the reserve of nervous energy drained from him and he collapsed again. A moment later the ambulance came, followed by a car with Martin and Calloway. The medics took care of Malone and the ambulance drove off in the direction of the camp.

Martin consulted a booklet. "That's it," he said.

Calloway looked over Martin's shoulder and nodded. "He'll go to the clink for that."

"For what?" asked Sally.

"This car was stolen in Arizona some time ago. Later a Ford was stolen and found with the plates missing. The Cadillac plates were found in the ditch. Stupid of him to try anything so simple."

"But how do you know? You're not connected with Arizona."

Calloway smiled. "The car has been seen a couple of times," he said, "always on its way east. Unfortunately, never seen when anybody could stop it."

"Name's Malone," said Sally.

Martin shrugged. "His name's Mud," he replied. "No crook gives his right name, Sally. Feel okay?"

"I think so. I'm a bit shaky."

"Look," said Calloway, "I'll drive you back; Pete can drive the jeep."

Pete Martin grinned. "I'll match you for the prospect," he said. "Or are you going to pull your rank on me?"

"I'll pull my rank," smiled Calloway. "Sally would rather ride with me anyway."

"You leave me out of this or I'll drive myself," replied Sally, grinning.

Martin and Calloway tossed coins and Martin drove Sally back, with Calloway following almost bumper to bumper and making faces. They arrived at the mobile encampment labelled "Spheresite" by newsmen. They didn't stop to watch the wandering black thing that now measured sixty feet in diameter, because they were used to seeing it. Getting through the guards was no trouble for them; but there was a triple row of armed men in uniforms to restrain the several thousand people who lined the marked circle.

Sally found Major Harris and inquired about the accident victim.

"The medicos say Mr. Malone is suffering from shock, malnutrition, and extreme fatigue," was his reply.

"But why—?"

Harris shrugged. "I wouldn't know. Apparently he is one of the thousands of people who believe that there is something that he can do about the sphere. Fanatic, no doubt. I'll bet a hat that when he comes out of his coma he will exhibit all the symptoms —anxiety neurosis, possibly a persecution complex, delusion of grandeur."

Sally smiled grimly. "I can see the first two," she said. "But why grandeur?"

"I mean that no doubt he will insist that he knows everything there is to be known about that thing—knows more and can do more than the top-flight physicists of the country—no, make that the world, now. Actually, the major countries of the world have all chipped in their brains."

"That's a good sign."

"Not entirely altruistic, though. If any secrets are to be uncovered, they all want an in. Normal; I don't blame them."

The telephone rang. The major

answered it, listened mostly, and then hung up with a smile. "Well," he said with a sigh of gratification. "We've uncovered something. The first glimmer just came through. Come on, Sally, we're invited to watch."

"How about Mr. Malone?"

"He's being transported to the city jail hospital. Too bad. Unstable people always go bats under this sort of strain. Forget him and come on. This is important!"

Important. The brooding black thing no longer roamed. Mile upon mile upon endless mile it had come since that day when Sally Desmond's car had been wrecked by the sphere of all-consuming blackness. Its path, at first, had been marked by holes of its own making. Its more recent trail was marked by dynamited buildings, excavated hills, chopped trees, and other man-made ruin to keep the sphere from its fodder.

But now its aimless wanderings had stopped. Sally breathed a prayer of thanks as she saw the thing immobile.

Beneath its vast curve, his head less than ten feet from the deadly thing, stood Dr. Forrest of the Office of Scientific Research and Development. His pleasant face was no longer lined with care. Instead, he had a jaunty, self-confident smile, and his attitude now was one of daring the devilish thing to move once more.

He spoke after the personnel had assembled, and amplifiers carried his voice to the waiting people outside the camp. The radio lines were there, too, carrying the news to the world.

"We have," he said, "succeeded in one thing. We have immobilized the roaming sphere. For the technical listener, I state openly that we have discovered that a high-intensity multipolar magnetic field coupled with a complex electrostatic field attracts the sphere, as a ball bearing might follow a powerful magnet."

ALONG the road towards Cincinnati the ambulance roared, carrying Jed Malone's inert body. Unconscious because of fatigue, shock, and lack of food, Malone did not hear Dr. Forrest's voice coming from the radio in the ambulance.

"Now there are two courses we can pursue," said Forrest. "We could, if we wished, build a large steel shell around this thing and create a vacuum in the shell. This would stop its growth while we study it. The entire scientific world is curious to the extreme as to its nature, which we admit is utterly baffling.

"However, we are convinced that someday we shall know what it is—or was—without keeping it as a constant threat to our safety. So we won't keep it any longer than is necessary. The boys at White Sands have a rocket capable of attaining enough velocity to leave the Earth forever. Now that we can pin this devil down, we'll pin it down to the nose of this rocket and send it out into space—"

His final words were drowned out by a roar of applause, which died in a long sigh of relief—which changed into a period of rejoicing. Every man celebrated in his own way. Some prayed, some drank, some worked.

And one eventually came out of his coma and found himself looking at a prison orderly.

"How you feel, buddy?"

"Weak. Listen, I'm Jed Malone and—"

"I'm Henry Waldron, and so what?"

"Look, Waldron, I've got to get to the scene of the ne—"

"So's everybody else. But just relax. They've solved it, Malone."

Jed leaned back with a sigh of relief.

"Then they know."

"Enough, buddy. Enough. Now take it easy. You're in a bad jam, y'know. Stealing cars ain't good."

Malone smiled. "People will understand soon enough. You see, I made that negasphere inadvertently, and when I—"

"You made it," said the orderly in a soothing tone. His left hand was fumbling for the call button.

"I made it, by applying the principles of my theory, which was given at the American Physical Society. Now that they all know what it is, those who were there will know immediately that I'm right, and that my theft of the car was an attempt to help."

"Well, you can take it easy, doctor."

"I'm no Ph.D. Just a Master's degree so far. But this will be the turning point. They laughed at me when I presented that theory—mostly because they couldn't understand it. Now that they know all about it, I'll receive full credit."

The guard smiled tolerantly. "That may take a bit of time," he said. His job now was to keep the patient engaged in conversation until the psychiatrist arrived.

"No doubt. But it shouldn't be too long; there are my complete notes to refer to. I hope they're all right, by the way."

"Of course. And you don't have to worry about the sphere. They immobilized it with electrical gadgets. I hear that they could build some sort of a shell around it, make a vacuum inside to keep it from growing if they wanted to study—Hey, what's the matter?"

Jed Malone's face was becoming distorted in a look of sheer horror. "No!" he cried. "They mustn't!"

"Take it easy, Mr. Malone. They won't—they've got a better idea. They're getting a rocket from White Sands and they're going to pin it to the nose of the rocket and fire it to hell out into space. That will—"

"God, no! That is certain death!"

"Now, take it easy. They know what they're doing."

"The fools!" cried Malone. "Waldron, you've got to help."

"Sure I will," replied the guard soothingly. His hand fumbled for the hidden call button once more and he signaled frantically. Elsewhere in the hospital, orderlies were stopped in their work while they took from the locker a straitjacket and restraining sheet. "Cripes," said one of them, "that guy Malone must be a real psycho."

The guard was saying, "Now tell me why the thing is so dangerous."

"You know what contraterrene matter is?"

"Contra-what?"

"Contraterrene matter. Means matter opposite to that found on the Earth—Terra terrene, pertaining to Terra, or Earth. Earthly, or terrene matter is made of atoms with protons in the nucleus. Protons have positive electrical charges. Contraterrene matter has negatrons in the nucleus; they have negative charges."

"And that thing is contraterrene matter?"

"No. That sphere is even more deadly."

"But what would be deadly about contra-what-is-it?"

"Protons and negatrons are opposing particles," explained Malone eagerly. "When they meet, they cancel one another."

"And then—" prompted Waldron.

"Like an atom bomb. Gives out with terrible radiations."

"And this what-you-call-it?"

"Negasphere," said Malone. "It is the absolute negative of everything. Nega-

tive space." Jed struggled for words to explain the theoretical concept to the guard. "It will absorb the universe as a blotter soaks up water."

"I don't quite get it," said Waldron. "What happens if it's shot out into space where it has nothing to feed on?"

"That's the point. Outer space is sheer vacuum. Ergo, the thing can grow."

The guard smiled. "So they've got it backwards, right? The way to make the sphere get smaller is to feed it all we can instead of removing everything in its path."

"Of course," replied Malone. "That's why the growth of the sphere is erratic," he explained. "It grows faster in a rarified medium. In the air, for instance, its growth is faster than it is when the sphere is passing through the ground, where the matter is denser. They've been measuring wrong," said Malone. "I could tell them."

"How would you go about it?"

"Instead of measuring the mass of stuff put into it and trying to make correlation between that and the size of the sphere, they should get a physicist to calculate the amount of space between the atoms in the matter and proceed on that basis, remembering that all the time the expanding sphere is growing on the space between the atoms. Its growth is proportional to the reciprocal of the presence of matter."

Something in Malone's mode of speech touched a cell of recollection in Waldron's mind. It irritated for a bare instant and then touched off a train of memory. A few years before there had been a fantasy writer in the mental institution adjoining the prison; a writer who had, for some months, begun to believe the things he had written. The writer talked much the same kind of double-talk.

Inadvertently, the guard chuckled. The writer had been as cuckoo as a clock and sounded it. So was and so did Malone.

Malone looked up sharply at the chuckle. "What's funny?" he demanded

"Nothing. You just reminded me of a guy named Wesley Long. He was—"

"I know Wesley Long! Dammit, you don't believe me!"

"Now, wait a minute—"

"You dope!" yelled Malone. "You —let me out of here where I can do some good!"

Malone sat up, swung his feet over the side of the bed, and stood up, tossing the covers aside. He started forward. Waldron came forward too and put his hands on Malone's shoulders soothingly. He pressed back gently but firmly.

"Lie down," he said in a calm, firm voice.

"Like hell. Lie down while they wreck the universe?"

He hurled Waldron's hands aside and followed with a long punch. Waldron turned and let the fist go over his shoulder, and as Malone was recovering from the miss, Waldron neatly slipped a hypodermic needle into the muscle of Jed's upper arm.

When the orderlies arrived, they found that they did not require their restraining sheets. Jed Malone was lying back on the bed mumbling incoherently about the function of radial increase versus the velocity of the center of the negasphere.

"DR. FORREST," said Sally Desmond, "I've some notes here you might like to see. I took them from Malone's wrecked car. A treatise of some sort, called "A Theory on the Possibility of Negative Space", whatever that may mean."

Dr. Forrest laughed. "It's a rather interesting concept. I recall Malone."

"You know him?"

Forrest nodded. He told Sally about the incident at the American Physical Society, and then added, "Doubtless Malone's mind cracked a bit; he was probably hurrying here to tell us all about what to do. Negative space!"

Sally Desmond wrinkled her forehead. "Negative space—sounds as though it might mean solid matter."

"Hardly. 'Solid matter' consists of atoms separated by vast distances. Relative to their sizes, the atoms are about as far apart as the stars in the galaxy." He riffled through the pages of the manuscript and paused here and there. "Malone may have been cracked," he said. "Or more likely, completely self-sold on a theory of his own. However, I've seldom known a man capable of acquiring a master's degree in physics who couldn't think—no matter how warped his thinking was. Malone may have a few interesting points after all."

"Then it isn't all wasted?"

"Oh, no." Forrest leaned back in his chair. "We've a breather now," he said. "We're going to manhandle that sphere and that will be that. After we get that off our chest, we'll have a look at Mr. Malone's theories."

Forrest pressed the button on his desk communicator. "Franklin? Come in here a mo, will you?"

"Right," replied the mathematician. When he entered the office, Forrest handed the sheaf of notes to him.

"Sally retrieved them from that wrecked car," explained Forrest. "They might prove interesting."

Franklin riffled through the notes and then re-read the front page. "Jed Malone," he murmured. "Seems to me I recall a tale of woe about him. Isn't he the guy who got laughed off the rostrum for some quarter-baked theory about matter and space?"

"The same."

"Well, when the cream of the world's physicists call a theory ridiculous, who am I to dispute them? What do you hope to find?"

"Just run through the math, Doc. Maybe the guy is dividing by zero or something to get the answers he got. I wouldn't know; you would."

"Oh, I'll take a look," smiled Franklin cheerfully. "It'll be interesting tracking down his errors."

Forrest nodded.

"Take your time."

"I'll wait until the rocket is fired. When's it going?"

"It's ready now," Forrest said. We'll fire it at dusk tomorrow evening."

The mathematician nodded. "The synergy curve—"

Sally blinked. "The what?" she asked inadvertently.

Franklin came out of his mood of semi-abstraction. "What? Oh, synergy? It's a term invented to describe the idea of firing a rocket at such a time and in such a direction as to use the rotation of the Earth to add to the velocity. If we wanted to hurl the thing into the sun, we'd fire it at the crack of dawn. But we're firing it in the other direction, so that the course of the rocket will be a part-spiral curving around in the direction of the Earth's rotation. It will approach a radial course asymptotically by about midnight tomorrow night."

"We're firing the thing a bit to the north and toward the galactic rim," added Forrest for Sally's information. He stood up. "Going to tear into that paper or—?"

Franklin dropped the sheaf of notes on Forrest's desk. "Not me," he said with a laugh. "I'm going to watch you work. I'll skim through this after

we've shot the black menace out of the way."

CHAPTER FOUR

Into the Sun!

MALONE awoke just a few minutes after midnight, fully ten hours before the time predicted by the doctor who had examined Jed after Waldron's administration of the sedative. The doctor was unaware of the power of Malone's mental guardian. His subconscious knowledge of the danger that threatened all of the Earth and the universe was strong enough to fight its way through the sedative.

He had been fed by tube and so he was no longer weak from hunger, though he was still famished. He looked around cautiously in the darkened hospital ward. There was a light in the corridor, beyond the screen-glass doors, but there was no one in the room.

He tried to lift his arms and found them bound in the restraining sheet. He cursed silently and strained against the bonds. He was strapped in, but not too tightly. Apparently someone had made the decision that a completely drugged man need not be bound fast; somewhere Jed had heard that it was not good for anybody to lie in the same position too long, and the slight freedom in the sheet was left to give him some limited amount of motion.

Malone stopped trying his strength and began to think. An hour of work with teeth and the corner of the bed resulted in a tear that Jed widened bit by bit until he had one hand and arm free. A few moments later he stood beside the bed, wondering how he could get from the jail hospital in Cincinnati to the sphere site near Mason while dressed in a hospital nightgown.

In the dim light, Malone draped the remnants of the sheet over a lamp cord that hung from the ceiling. Then he stood beside the door and emitted a howl.

An orderly came, peered through the door, and saw the sheet still swinging.

He opened the door to grab for what he thought to be Malone standing erect and trying to escape. Malone hit him with both fists from behind and he dropped like a log.

Jed bound the guard with the remains of the sheet and went out of the room dressed in the guard's uniform. He locked the door with the guard's key and opened the door at the end of the corridor. Here he found a cabinet that opened with another key and in that he found a revolver.

He confronted a second guard with the revolver and forced him to lead the way to the garage. Then in the same ambulance that had brought him there, Jed Malone left the hospital with the siren wailing. He drove like a madman and in a few minutes he was in the open country to the north of Cincinnati and on his way to Mason.

He turned on the police radio in the ambulance and listened, expecting momentarily that the thing would break out in a rash of orders to apprehend the fleeing ambulance.

It was nearing four o'clock in the morning by the time Malone approached the encircling fence. The gate swung wide. Malone saw a group of buildings. He pulled up before the nearest and stopped, the siren dying as he snapped the ignition off.

He took a deep breath. He was here! At long last he had arrived. Now—

Malone grunted. So he was here. All of his efforts had been aimed at arriving; he had laid no plans to be followed once he had arrived. He

must find someone in authority, and then convince them of the truth of his theory. But whom, and how?

Malone looked out the door of the ambulance and thought furiously. One of the gate guards was sauntering up the road towards him. Maybe the guard could tell him whom to see—

The radio, still turned on, blared forth: "Warning! Cincinnati and Mason police be on the lookout for the city ambulance which was stolen from—"

Malone snapped the switch, but the damage was done. The guard shouted and broke into a run. Malone ducked out of the opposite door and ran into the space between the temporary buildings. He crossed a mud-filled street and cut between two more buildings. Then, coming to the end of the settlement, Malone cursed, stopped, and with only a moment of pause, headed for an open window. He dove in, wriggled through, and somersaulted onto the floor, sitting up finally and—

He blinked at the sudden light that came from a naked electric lamp in the ceiling.

"Well!" said a cold contralto.

Sally Desmond stood beside her bed with one hand on the light switch and the other curled around a nasty-looking automatic that seemed ten sizes too large for her small fingers.

"Don't be alarmed," Jed told her. "I came here to—"

"I don't care what you're here for," she snapped. "You won't get it!"

"But I'm—"

"Oh. I didn't recognize you with your face washed," she said. "Mr. Malone, I believe."

"Yes. And the reason I'm here—"

"You'll tell it to the guards," she said. "And don't try to stop me. You're a trespasser, and I'm within my rights if I shoot you." She turned to the door with a firm step that was not hindered by the clinging silk of her nightgown.

"Wait, please. Just listen to me for one minute—then call the guards if you still want to."

"She paused. "All right. Go ahead."

"Look," said Jed desperately. "They think that sphere grows on matter. It doesn't. It's negative space and instead of expanding when matter is shoved into it, it only grows when nothing is fed to it. I made it, and I know."

"Yes?" said Sally.

Malone pleaded, "It makes sense if you'll listen. "Reverse every law of the universe you can think of, and you have the physical continuum of negative space. It expands when nothing is fed to it, it contracts when matter is shoved into it."

"But it does expand—"

"Sure," he said dryly. "The densest matter is mostly empty space. But the negasphere expands when it feeds on empty space—or put it another way—it expands when it has no matter to restrict its growth. So it must not be fired out into space where it can expand without limit!

"Once it is out in deep space, it will expand until all of our normal space is contained in it. Then it—not us—will be the universe."

Sally looked at him. "Where do you think they should put it?"

"Into the sun," he said.

"That's about all," she snapped. She started for the door again.

He smiled sourly. "Please let me have my say at the big boss's desk? I'd like to save us all—and you look so soft and pretty in that nightgown that I'd hate to see you die—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Sally, for the first time aware of her state of undress.

She looked downwards and gasped. And Jed Malone stepped forward and slapped at the gun, knocking it from her hand.

He smothered her in his arms and bore her back by sheer weight. He stifled her scream with a large hand and gritted his teeth when she bit into the palm and drew blood. But he bore her back and then carried her to the bed where he wound her in a sheet before he tied her securely.

He snapped out the light and said, "Occasionally it does happen that everybody's out of step but Joe. Every now and then one man alone knows the truth while the rest of the world scoffs and makes nasty cracks about his sanity. Usually the guy is vindicated long after his death. But I'd prefer that someone would be alive to vindicate me and for choice, I'd like to be alive to know about it.

"Now, maybe I'm nuts, and maybe the world is right and I'm wrong. But it stands to reason that I know more about that sphere than any living man because I made it—and by God I'm going to destroy it!"

The faint light from outside showed her eyes, large and round, looking up at him.

"Is the rocket ready?"

Sally paused, and then because she believed it impossible for him to do anything, she nodded. It was almost certain that Malone would be apprehended when he tried to approach the thing.

"If I let you loose, will you scream?"

Sally shrugged mentally. Then she shook her head. With a smile, Malone unbound her.

"I'm doing this because I want to convince you," he said. "I'm no criminal. But certain things have to get done, legally or not. What is your name?"

"Sally Desmond."

"Then, Miss Desmond, you will put on a dress and you will walk with me as though you were walking with a friend. People will die if you don't—and probably the universe will too."

Sally slipped a dress on quickly. Here she could do nothing. Out there, something could be done somehow.

With his hand on the gun in his pocket, Malone walked with Sally to the jeep parked in front of her door. They got in, Sally driving.

They left the street as the searching guards rounded the other end and sent up a hue and cry. Then they were out of earshot and driving like mad away from the settlement towards the huge bulking sphere of blackness that was becoming visible in the graying sky.

THE SHOUTING rose. Dr. Franklin opened the door of his shelter in time to see Major Harris and Dr. Forrest racing across toward their jeep. He followed and dived into the rear seat as Harris took off with a jerk.

"What's up?" he gasped.

"Malone's escaped. Clipped a guard and swiped the ambulance and drove."

"Where—?"

"Got in. Disappeared. Last seen driving with Sally out towards the Thing."

"Got to find him," gasped Franklin.

"Damned right. Madman might wreck the ship."

"We'll get him," said Harris, turning out of the street and racing across open country.

The other jeep was far ahead and Harris drove like fury to catch up.

"Take it easy," yelled Forrest. "He's got Sally, remember?"

Harris groaned and cursed, but he did not slacken their speed. He reached for the radiophone and spoke: "Take

it easy," he ordered. "That's Malone and he's nuts. He's got Sally for a hostage."

Malone and Sally drove up to the hulking black sphere that was poised atop the waiting rocket.

"I don't like this," he said quietly, "but remember what will happen if you yell."

"I know," she said.

"I'm not afraid to start shooting," he told her. "The entire universe rests on this, you know." He lifted the pocket of his coat meaningly. "I'm just a friend that wants to see the thing with you."

"I remember," she said. She turned from him to the guards and watched them start to gather in order to investigate this early-morning visitation.

She did not believe Malone. To permit him to follow through was death anyway if he hurled the negasphere into the sun. Either way was death, but one way was life for the rest of the world at least.

"It's Malone," she cried. "Get him!"

Sally threw herself forward onto the ground, trembling as she waited for the thunder of the gun and the shock of the bullet.

Malone cursed, and dropped beside her. "Shoot!" he snarled at the four guards. "Shoot and be damned to you."

Sally turned over and clawed at him. He slapped her hands away, caught her wrist and twisted it so that the girl turned over again, away from him. He brought her wrist up between her shoulder blades until she whimpered, and then he yelled:

"Shoot, damn you."

"You can't do this, Malone!"

"I'm doing it!"

"There's four of us. We'll get you."

"Not before I get her." Malone peered over Sally's shoulder and fired once. The foremost guard howled and dropped his rifle; his arm was shattered at the elbow.

The second guard lifted and aimed. The corporal knocked the gun down. "There's help on the way," he said. "What do you want, Malone?"

"Drop your guns and march away," snapped Malone.

"Okay, but don't hurt Sally."

"Do as I say and everybody will be all right."

There was a clatter of guns and the guards moved aside slowly. Malone stood up, almost lifting Sally by her bent arm. She cried out in pain and Malone said, "It would have been easier to take it quietly. Now march!"

Major Harris peered through the morning haze and cursed again. "What are they doing?" he asked.

Forrest did not have the job of keeping his eyes on the ground for driving, but the bouncing of the jeep made clear seeing difficult. "He's bluffed the guards," he said. A moment later the sound of the shot came to them.

"Sally?" groaned Harris.

"No. Malone fired that from the ground. I saw the flash."

"What are they doing now?"

"The guards are leaving—Malone's leading Sally towards the firing panel."

"The devil."

Harris trod on the gas.

"The firing panel," he yelled. "The devil's going to fire the rocket?"

"Fire it or wreck it!"

"Wreck it, I hope. We can get another—"

"He's firing it!"

Franklin looked at his watch. "It'll hit the sun if he fires it now," he yelled. The roar of the jeep almost covered his voice and the jouncing

made it almost impossible to keep his seat. "Listen, there's something."

"The sun!" screamed Forrest. "Faster!"

Then from the base of the rocket came a narrow tongue of fire. It swelled and it mushroomed out beneath the firing frame.

Harris gave one last spurt and then swung the jeep in a short arc that tumbled Franklin out onto the ground. Harris, braced and prepared for the jolt, landed running, took a half dozen steps and dove flat on his stomach behind a hummock of ground. He drew his revolver.

The flare of flame billowed and the rocket lifted uncertainly a few feet and hung there, poised on its pillar of flame. This was the critical moment.

"God!" prayed Harris, aiming the gun carefully. His hand squeezed on the trigger.

"No!" screamed Franklin. He raced forward and leaped, kicking at the revolver in Harris's hands.

And at the same instant, the rocket flared in a torrent of flame and started to lift. Slowly at first it went, then it moved faster and finally took off into the sky with a screaming roar. The monstrous sphere of negative space went atop the rocket and as they headed into the graying sky, the jet-black sphere outlined the roaring flame of the rocket.

Rocket, flame, and sphere diminished and disappeared.

"I missed the devil— Dammit, Franklin, why did you—?"

"He did it!"

"Yes!" roared Harris. "Now what?"

Franklin grinned. "It's all right. He's right, you see! I was trying to tell you before— I spent all night working on his report. He's right. The center of Sol is the place for that thing." Franklin went back to the jeep. "I'll explain later. Let's go see Malone. We've got a lot of apologizing to do to that young man."

But when they arrived, they had no more than time to repeat Franklin's statement; then Jed and Sally were busy apologizing to each other —too busy to take any notice of anyone else's attempts along the same line.

ON THE NEWSSTANDS!

THE DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE

By A. Merritt

The strangest adventure any man had encountered since Time began faced Leif Langdon when he tumbled through that Alaskan mirage—into a weird, lost world.

This beautiful and exciting novel, which some fantasy enthusiast consider the finest in a magnificent field, is on sale now.

Don't miss this classic!



STAR-BROTHER

Dying Earthman and deathless Venusian, they joined in the strangest comradeship the stars had seen . . . to build, from its mind-wrenching horror, a barrier that would forever preserve their planets !

By Stanley Mullen

HE ROUSED from his stupor, stared numbly at the visiport. Venus lay dead ahead. A blinding crescent of reflected light edged the great bulging disk. Kelland smiled grimly. Dead or alive, he was going to be the first man to land on Venus. One by one the others had died, some quickly from what seemed only superficial burns, others slowly in frightful agonies as the radiation seared flesh from bone. Kelland had hung on, and he felt a half-humorous contempt for his late companions whose bodies he had callously stacked in a heap at the rear of the control room.

Kelland was tough. He prided himself on the fact. You have to be tough to live very long in space exploration, and Kelland was older than most veterans of the Martian and Lunar expeditions.

Before losing consciousness, he had even strapped himself into the control seat, hoping for a miracle.

A quick glance at the control panel, with its glittering rows of gauges, told him all he needed to know. Only minutes separated the crippled ship from that weirdly concave circle of darkness which showed in the visiplate. At thirty miles a second, the doomed Todalla was diving in at too acute an angle. A crash was inevitable. This was the end of that long, long orbit from Earth.

Casually, Kelland toyed with the switches activating the forward braking-tubes. No result. The mechanical parts had probably already begun the swift corrosion of radioactivity. Maybe the relays were jammed. Even if they were not, and the automatic mass-proximity relays worked the braking-jets, the distance was too short.

Kelland shrugged. He was dying anyhow. Why should he care? Even if he survived the crash, he could not live long. His bulky, heavily-insulated space garments were allowing unbelievable heat to seep through. The control cabin must be like a furnace. Some of the controls felt almost spongy to his faltering touch. Already the radiation burns were tingling

● **He felt a dread of the alien species who had created such a masterwork of Titan size and goblin coloring . . .**



along his nerve ends. Inside, his bone marrow must be disintegrating, along with everything else on board.

Kelland could see nothing definite in the seas of opaque mist which swathed the planet. Fog? Or dust clouds? The experts had never agreed. Whatever it was, fifteen miles of it blanketed the surface like a deep ocean. Fifteen miles — half a second at the present speed. The flicker of an eyelash.

The disk expanded visibly, coming up at him with heart-gripping steadiness. Only faint blurs and fuzziness at the edges, evidenced any rotation. He blinkd, trying to clear his fogged vision. When he looked again, the disk had changed from concave to convex.

The mass proximity switches were a last hope. Radar impulses were still going out, but feebly, and growing weaker as the power dwindled.

The globe of harshly outlined blackness rushed up at him, ceased to be a globe, flattened oddly.

Relays clicked, blazed electric blue sparks as the switches went home. Somewhere forward, there was eerie hissing as the tubes blasted off. Snowy flame bathed the dome-like bow. Then a series of numbing shocks before the jets leveled off. Deceleration built into agony, and trickles of blood thrust from the man's eye-corners. A hot stream burst from his nostrils, drenching him. The staggering pain of full deceleration struck him like a hammer blow. His brain dissolved in roaring darkness. . . .

The Todalla nosed into the barrier mists, with the lone surviving crewman unconscious. . . .

THE SPACESHIP lay on its side, like a broken beetle. Oddments of wreckage had been flung in a wide fan where a storage hatch had burst its lugs. The hull was bent, scarred, strangely lopsided.

Kelland's first surprise was that he still lived. His helmet was dented and wedged firmly against the skull; reinforced breast armor had bent like soft cheese from the blow which hurled him so violently among the complex levers that he was lodged fast; his face plate of fused quartz was splintered by shock. Dazed and curiously sick, he still lived . . . and more, he breathed.

Gratefully he sucked in air, realizing suddenly how foul the atmosphere of the rocket had become after the rectifiers failed. . . .

Venus! This air should not be fit to breathe according to the briefing he'd had. Ammonia, methane. But here it was, and he was breathing it. The air had an odd taste and burned eerily after it got inside his lungs, but it was air . . . air, and a very similar mixture to the air he knew. No use bothering to test it now. It would do while he lasted.

Kelland got hold of the generator base and managed to pry himself loose from the wreckage of warped and battered controls.

Through the gap in the hull where the hatch-cover had ripped off, he looked out upon a deserted landscape. The Todalla seemed to have crashed among barren, rocky hills. Great cone-like crags of weathered stone shone with harsh brilliance. A curious expanse of grayness, luminous, not murky and dark as an overcast sky on Earth, extended endlessly to merge somewhere with a vague horizon. Nearby, a metal tower built like a series of rings, diminishing in size as they rose above the flattened surface, soared high toward the gray canopy. From a dark globe at the top, a single beam of incredibly bright light pointed

directly upward, penetrating the smooth seas of mist.

Unimaginative as he was, Kelland was impressed. There was an artificial look about the flattened area where the spaceship rested. Sparse grass grew here, but the jagged pinnacles of rock around him were nude.

As automatically as the robot pilots, Kelland scrambled out and began assembling and checking the scattered supplies. Some of the shielded containers were broken open, the food concentrates and other supplies already contaminated. Coolly, he estimated his chances. The air pressure was light, much lighter than Tibet, where he had trained and conditioned himself; but at any rate he was breathing. If the curious mist-barrier above served to screen out the deadly actinic rays—

He stopped.

His lips twisted in a bitter, scornful smile. How could he have forgotten? What meaning could survival reckonings have for him? He felt a tingling of his skin; hot rawness behind his eyes, in his lungs. Already the swiftly blighting decay of radioactivity must be working in him. . . .

"Twelve to forty-eight hours after exposure," the warnings had read.

The languid air stirred to his raucous laughter. Well, he had his ticket—he'd paid for it. Might as well play out the comedy. A lot of men would trade their lives to be in his spot: the first man on Venus.

Those long-haired technicians and speculators back on Earth talked pretty big about what was on Venus, what the atmosphere was, quoted spectrographic readings, thermocouple readings, calculated possible rates of rotation from the temperature of the visible layer. A lot they knew about it. He, Kelland, was there. He'd asked for it, and the gods of space had shoved it down his throat. The guessers back home had warned him it might be a fiery hot desert with continual sandstorms; in the old days, people had imagined riotous jungles of steaming heat filled with weird monsters; perhaps boiling seas around the equator, impossibly long days and nights, or a perpetual light side and dark side. . . .

There was no limit to the speculations people could make, but it took someone like him, Kelland, to go there and find out. The rest of them could guess; he knew.

At least where he was, there was no jungle, no boiling oceans, no desert, no storms. It seemed bleak but not uncomfortable. So far he had seen no water, but if the grass could grow, even sparsely, there must be some moisture. The ground even looked as if it might yield to some kind of cultivation.

Kelland crawled back into the ship and got to the sending-room.

The helioflash was useless, of course, without sun-power—he suspected that too little sunlight penetrated that layer of dense clouds or whatever to power the sender. The radio might do it. He went over the equipment carefully and found it in working order. The transmitter was small but potent, and he was well aware that the major observatories on Earth were all waiting, tensely, hopefully, for some word from the Todalla. One thing more, and he'd be ready to send. If that outside face of the barrier were ionized, he was wasting his time; the radio waves would be reflected back to the surface. He got sensitive instruments from the case and went outside to turn them full into that glare of luminous gray. The needles jerked and held strong. No use; the stuff was carrying a heavy charge.

Disgruntled, Kelland kicked idly at the shattered radar-sender. Not much hope there.

Outside again, Kelland broke into a food container, got out a thermal can of coffee, and drank it down black and steaming. The canned food was not appealing, but he ate it.

Suddenly, he felt lonely and bored. Too restless for sleep, hounded by the feeling that his time was short, he decided to explore. There was nothing to keep him to the ship; he could carry enough grub and drinkables for the time remaining.

Besides, he was interested in that metallic tower. Curiosity and a longing for companionship, of any kind, deviled him. Packing a kit of supplies, he set off in the general direction of the tower.

AS He drew near the base of the structure, the sky cleared suddenly above him and a huge, richly red-purple sun shone through. The atmosphere was clear as crystal, without the faintest hint of haze; the sky palest yellow green with hints of vague orange-tint. Here and there swam clots of blurred violet, clouds perhaps, with a faint suggestion of sparkling luminosity. As the mist-barrier vanished, the beam of blindingly brilliant light died out from the globe atop the tower.

From its base, a hundred feet in diameter, the structure seemed to reach up to fantastic heights. In spite of a grace and delicacy of design, the tower was solidly built of metal, part of which was plated with a facing material like translucent pale-green porcelain. There were no wires nor cables, no doors or windows, and Kelland thought only of some electrical device, not of a dwelling, as he studied it.

Kelland stood now at the edge of the cleared and flattened area. Close at hand rose the forbidding hills and gaunt spires, surrounded by spills of broken rock. A narrow, tortuous gorge led among them, descending steeply to lower ground. Kelland followed it and came out finally into a broad valley, with low, smoothly rounded hills, through which moved a broad, placidly flowing river. Kelland stopped, gasping in amazement.

On the nearer bank, filling a tremendous bend in the river, was a city for Titans. Built of the pure, blazing colors of the rainbow, it rose in smoothly rounded curves, individual buildings blending indistinguishably into the mass, piling up into forests of slender, glittering spires. Nothing earthlike could compare with its eerie geometries; its solid forms seemed to flow together and fuse, its materials were pure translucent color as if light had solidified. It sprang gradually from a sea of what Kelland thought were flower gardens, having no exact beginning and end.

Color juxtapositions were curious, but blended tastefully, seeming a part of the very structure. Even the rioting gardens showed definite arrangement, and seemed to work a delicate counterpoint to the patterns of the city.

Dazzled, attracted yet oddly disquieted by the alien beauty of the place, Kelland stood long minutes staring, before nerving himself to plunge across the grassy hillocks and flatlands toward the city.

The scarred metal covering of his food-kit reminded him that he was hungry again. Time must have passed, though he had been but vaguely conscious of it. As he walked he ate, throwing aside the thermal containers like some casual picnicker.

The city, as he drew near it, seemed

less like a city than a single, vastly complex dwelling. There were no walls or gates, no visible doors or windows.

A long, exquisitely curved ramp led upward, disappearing as the walls curved in upon it. This must be the entrance, for no other opening marred the careless symmetries of the façade. For Kelland, there was now no turning back. Cautiously, he ascended, awed by the magnificence, the tremendous technical achievement of the place. A dread of encountering the alien species who had created such a masterwork of Titan size and goblin coloring broke through the crust of Kelland's confidence, and dry fear rose to clutch at his throat.

As the walls shut down around him, he experienced a sensation of being watched. There was still no sign of living inhabitants, nor evidence of any past habitation. Floor, walls and ceiling were apparently of one substance, some translucent metal fused into a single mass. Illumination came from deep within, giving a glareless, shadowless light. Cavern-like, the passage drove straight into the heart of the building, with no side openings, no niches, no furnishings of any kind. It was utterly unlike a place where anything lived.

No fleck of dust, no mark of passage marred the smoothness of the floor.

Worst of all was the silence which hung everywhere like a tangible presence.

Deeper and deeper Kelland penetrated the structure, his uneasiness growing subtly. Imperceptibly the walls drew back, the ceiling lifted. He found himself in a high, vaulted chamber. Here the light held curious distortions, a flickering seemed to move eerily about; colors shifted unpleasantly, transmuting forms and running a gamut of shades while he watched.

Numberless apertures led from this chamber in all directions. These doorways, if such they were, puzzled Kelland. He studied them, watched while their sizes and shapes fluctuated, experimented with the distortions of light by moving about and looking at their arrangements from different directions. There was no order, no apparent pattern, no stability to them. It was almost as if they were part of a living organism.

Uncomfortable in the hugeness of the vaulted chamber, where his muted footsteps echoed and re-echoed sibilantly, Kelland chose an aperture at random and followed a steep, spiraling ramp which led upward. After a short ascent, he came to another junction chamber, turning aside from it to follow a rambling passage which led through a series of apartment-like nests of circular rooms. These apartments did not confine themselves to a single level but wandered aimlessly up, down and around.

The passage ended abruptly in a small, roughly circular cell, where a square block of metal protruded from the floor. Set into the walls were sheets of glass, apparently lenses or at least prismatic transparencies of some kind. As Kelland stared into them, his vision twisted agonizingly, turning back on itself. He saw his rough, homely face endlessly repeated, with cruel variations. A hard cramp got inside his eyes, writhed and remained.

Tired, badly frightened, Kelland sat down on the block, and fought the waves of dizziness which rose over him.

Soundlessly, the lights went out.

Kelland started upright, trying to peer into the blackness.

Out of the blank nothingness which surrounded him came a voice, a voice that spoke not in sound but in word images that burned within his brain.

"You cannot perceive us with your limited faculties. Do not try."

"Who are you? What are you?" Kelland screamed.

Waves of thought-force beat upon the inner core of his consciousness. First they came in word-images which glowed like fire upon the inner shell of his mind; then graphic symbols, like half-seen, half-understood abstractions; later in complex pictures. Seas of new, breath-taking knowledge flooded him — profundities which drowned out and swept away the feeble concepts of his culture; a sickening grasp at infinities beyond his understanding, beyond even the fiery wings of imagination. . . .

THEN it was gone. The presences he had sensed withdrew. A heavy silence oppressed the darkness.

Slowly Kelland sank back upon the bench. He understood now, vaguely, that it had been created for his comfort, a gesture of compromise to his anatomical structure.

The vastness, the unthinkable profundities of the revelation staggered him. Weak and ill with his tremendous effort of mind, he relaxed, groping at some kind of understanding.

Gradually the darkness lightened. A luminous grayness grew steadily in intensity. The pressure of silence lessened, and again Kelland was conscious of the presences.

It was distracting, being unable to face them. He felt that they were laughing at him, and words tumbled from his mouth in hopeless confusion. Even to him, they sounded strange, muffled, contorted, as if the images struggled for clarity in an unfamiliar medium. Disturbed, the fear on him again, he fell silent.

The silence seemed to approve. Again the word-images came, beating at him, thrusting themselves into his mind.

"Do not waste your energy trying to imagine the nature of our being—who or what we are does not matter. A creature like you would be unable to understand so complicated a life-form as ours. It is better that you do not try."

Kelland writhed. There was no contempt in the message, no suggestion of disdain or hint that to them he was repulsive and inferior. But the knowledge of his limitations and the appalling vastness of the concepts he had so dimly grasped, made him conscious of his species as one of the lower orders. His soul cringed away from them, and he felt as nakedly hideous, undeveloped, incomplete as a dog must feel in the presence of man.

After a pause, the waves of mind-power swept over Kelland once more. This time there seemed a subtle difference, as if a more exact focus had been made; he felt confusion lessen, and the images became sharper.

"You are right," the images replied to his unspoken question. "There is a change. In order to relieve your confusions, I have separated myself from our group-consciousness, and will deal with you now as an individual. Also, since your inability to perceive me makes communication more difficult, I can offer you a focus for your attention."

A smear of glowing, molten color began to manifest itself upon the curtain of luminous mist. Without specific form, bodiless, like some three-dimensional projection of light, it hung motionless, yet seemed to flow

and fuse with endless mutations of color.

"Long, long have we known that our neighboring planet, which you name Earth, was inhabited. From our distance we have studied it carefully and in some detail. Naturally, there is much that we could never understand. It was thought at one time that we should make overtures to the most intelligent of your beings, but we were cautious. After certain unpleasant but enlightening experiences with other orders elsewhere, we had learned to think long before making contact with other life-forms.

"With some of the more highly civilized beings of other systems, we have held communications for many generations, yet they need nothing from us and have little to offer ourselves. Strange, that our nearest neighbors should be so ill-suited to exchange ideas and necessities with us. We have much to offer your kind, much knowledge that you need desperately, but we distrust the gifts you might bring in return.

"For a time we studied Earth and its brute folk most diligently, longing to reach across the gulf and raise some species to a higher state. Then we watched, startled, your swift mutation from the brute stage. So much accomplished in so short a time, and yet you have a long way still to follow to the ultimate goal of your development. With growing uneasiness we saw knowledge spring up among you, knowledge and the thirst for still greater conquests. Among your minds are a few which burn with the brightest flames of intellect, but no individual beings are greater than their group-mind.

"With us there is little individual entity; each of us is part of the whole, the group-unity; we do not function apart as readily as we do as a group.

"It was decided by our group-council that we should make no effort to make contact with the people of Earth. Meddling with situations imperfectly understood could lead to untold damage. Not only that, but we feared for your safety should your kind gain knowledge more rapidly than the ability to use it. At first we thought it best to wait until you learned enough to seek us out; then to share freely with you all our hard-learned secrets. Later, as we observed your scientific skills and perceptions so rapidly outstripping, even engulfing, your slowly developing wisdom—we began to fear for ourselves. Too much of the brute nature still lingers in you; of kind-unity you have none. Centuries ago, when still your arts of learning were in their infancy, we decided to veil ourselves from you, to swathe our world in impenetrable mystery; hence the reflector-barrier. Tell me, do not your kind know more of the further stars than of our planet?"

Kelland sensed something like a tentacle of thought-force probe his mind. As he willed himself to answer, before ever words left his lips, he sensed that the answer was received and noted.

"Since that time," continued the alien thoughts, "we have ignored your planet. Your arrival was a complete surprise to us. Knowing the stage of your scientific development several of your centuries ago, it was difficult for us to realize that any interplanetary travel could be dreamed of so soon. We were not prepared for you. Tell me, what did you seek here that seemed worth the dreadful risks you took to cross the gulf of space?"

Again Kelland felt the knowledge sucked from his very brain as forces

probed deeply, sorting the required answers from his jumbled confusion of thought.

"Your unannounced arrival was a great surprise to all of us," said the alien thoughts. "Had we been better prepared, the incident would not have occurred. When your craft came through the barrier screens, it was necessary to create a protective area around you, or you would have died in a matter of seconds, from exposure to the true nature of our world, our customary environment. Time was short, but we did what was possible. The composition of an artificial atmosphere approximating that of your planet was most difficult, and not altogether successful. However, it served. And whatever you saw, or thought you saw, of our actual surface world on your way here bears little relation to the reality. We created a world for you to live in temporarily, until we could study you as an example of your species at close range.

"This was our first opportunity to study an actual example of an alien race. Our first step was to re-create both you and your ship in exact detail. Both were so badly damaged in the passage through the force-field and the actual crash as to be useless for our purposes. The duplication of the ship was elementary. Were you back now at the place where you made your landing, you would find a complete new vessel, exactly the same as the original in every way, standing close beside your own ship. Amid the shattered wreckage of the original, you would find your own shattered body. The re-creation of your physical entity was simple enough; the transference of memory, identity, and all the manifold patterns of thought-culture was much more difficult. Does the thought disturb you?"

KELLAND'S brain rioted at the suggestion. He squirmed and half-rose from the bench.

Something like a wave of laughter vibrated from the alien mind. "You do not accept the thought; that is curious. I have sensed a stubbornness in you, a denial of truth, illogical, one of your brute-patterns, no doubt. But it puzzles me. Why should I mislead you?"

Kelland stifled the angry words which boiled up in him, deliberately blanking out his mind.

"I fear we have reached the end of discussion," said the alien, with a hint of sorrow in the thought. It was the first recognizable emotion Kelland had sensed in the aliens. "While our group-consciousness debates your fate, it is necesary that I complete the examination. It will be unpleasant for you, but there is no choice. I must enter your consciousness, learn all that you know of your culture, your complete thought-patterns, even those of which you are unconscious. There will never be another such opportunity, for after this our screen will be so completely energized that any unwanted visitors will be utterly destroyed on contact. I must absorb your consciousness, your complete identity; when it has been recorded, I will return it to you . . . for whatever time remains to you."

"You're wasting your time, killing me," Kelland burst out. "I was dying when the ship hit."

"You are mistaken," the word-images corrected gently. "The new body is uncontaminated."

A wave of terrific mind-force struck Kelland. For a moment he reeled backward, then, furiously angry, he fought back. A wild impulse urged him to break free and run from the chamber. He got three long steps

toward the doorway when invisible bonds descended over him; he felt the cold prisoning of metallic clamps on wrists and ankles, knew that he was being lifted and transported bodily. He remembered being placed gently but firmly on the block, spread-eagled, arms and legs pinioned tightly again it as if with invisible bonds.

Unable to moye, he felt deadly pressure beat upon his mind. Sweat beaded his lips, stung his eyes, as he struggled vainly to combat the pressure. A vortex of darkness swirled about him.

"It is useless to strive against it," the voice within his brain murmured.

Slowly the images faded. Kelland fought; but memory clouded, identity itself gave way gradually. Something cold and alien crowded its way into his brain. His very thoughts seemed drawn from him in hideous mental vivisection. While consciousness remained, he struggled, hopelessly, in vague terror, in bitter anger at this violation of his last core of human dignity.

Before the darkness enveloped him, there was a moment of strange and terrible beauty. As the other being entered and absorbed his identity, the two merged. Kelland stared in bleak anguish into the furthest immensities of Alien Spirit, treading the star gulfs, experiencing odysseys of thought beyond the wildest dreams of man.

But the vortices of roaring blackness swirled with ever increasing tempo, sucking him down into abysses of fiery darkness. A flickering recognition of the battle lost . . . then blankness, horror unutterable. . . .

TIME extended beyond the limits of infinity. Eventually, a spot of colored flame rose and danced in his brain, and his subconscious mind followed its eerie convolutions. In the painful awakening was realization of spiritual death and resurrection—Kelland lay gasping upon the metal block while the dancing flame exploded and sparks like splintered light drove through his brain and body.

With returning memory came recognition of his identity, and an awareness of being alone, blessedly alone again with himself.

Memory flowed through him, galling, and he concentrated his mind-power up the vivid stain of drifting light.

Response was instantaneous. The word-images formed themselves within his consciousness.

"It is as we thought. Worse. . . . Existence amid such chaos, such horror, must be unendurable." Even the word-images seemed to writhe and stir with repulsion. "That such a people—our nearest neighbors among the inhabited worlds—should be so incapable, so unworthy, of receiving our gifts! It would be a kindness to blot such miserable beings from existence."

Kelland found himself responding in kind to the telepathic communication. The images moved more easily now, as if some sort of rapport had been established. And something of his horror, his disgust, transmitted itself along with the images.

"Now that I've seen something of what you're really like, I can only pray for one thing . . . that our kinds should never meet. If I could get past your barrier screen and send a message, it would be to warn away all other expeditions from Venus."

After a prolonged pause, there came a beating vibration of reply, coldly, without emotion: "At the moment, shaken by my revulsion at your species, I could agree most heartily with

your desire. However, the decision of our council will doubtless be tempered by our greater horizons of evolution; fortunately for you and your species, our kind is the more tolerant race. Even such gulfs of difference as separate us are not impossible to bridge . . .

"Yet eons of development separate our states of being. Were the decision mine, I should release you with a warning. I should send back this message to your world. 'Develop according to your own patterns, people of Earth. Conquer your diseases of all kinds, of both mind and body; master first your physical environment, then most important of all, master yourselves. When you have done this, come again to us—for we have much to give you.'

"But, as I have said, the decision is not altogether mine to make. Not for generations has there been individual dissent from the group-decision of our kind.

"I must leave you now, to place the records of my study before our council. Do not let thoughts of escape in that accurately duplicated spaceship tempt your mind. Even though that message you long to send back to Earth is nearest our hearts, there are simpler and less dangerous ways. . . ."

"It would have been easier to let me die," Kelland burst out angrily. "Why don't you kill me and have done with it?"

"If necessary, that will be done . . . with infinite regret," came the reply.

Kelland sensed withdrawal of the alien personality, and the oppressive silence lay heavily about him.

His mind toyed automatically with thoughts of escape. In imagination, he was in the reconstructed spaceship, rising toward that curiously opaque mist-barrier, trailing streamers of glory as the jets gave forth their fearful power. Then he was past the barrier, the message clicking out on the transmitter, a wave of relief flooding over him as the "Message received" came through. A terrible nostalgia for Earth and all it could mean to a space-wanderer tortured him, and he longed to be starting the long tangential orbit home, Venus and its mysteries dead astern, left swiftly behind as the rocket accelerated. . . .

With desperate savagery he wrenched at the invisible bonds—and flung himself to the metallic floor. The bonds were gone.

Instantly he was on his feet, running with hard purpose. Each stage of his journey into the alien city was deeply etched in his mind, and he retraced his steps with careful precision. He slowed to a rapid walk, lest he slip and fall on the porcelain-like floor. Down the exquisitely curved ramp he went, and through the circular rooms. The city was alive with whispering echoes. The muffled clink of his boots on the smoothly polished metal rang in his ears like the clangor of alarm bells.

Behind him rose a murmurous, excited buzzing as if swarms of excited bees sought viciously to repel an invader. In the sound was a note of anger and dismay, and from far behind came a flicker of oddly unsteady lights. Kelland took the last gallery at full speed, reckless of footing.

Outside, the sun still burned hotly in a sky of purest yellow-green.

The sounds of aroused pursuit lent wings to Kelland's feet. Without pausing to speculate on the reality of the world about him, he went through it hastily, trampling the seas of flower gardens, leaving a lengthening wake in the curious grasses, as he headed

directly for the cleft among the rock hills beyond which lay the ship.

Panting, breathless, he came through the tangle of rocky gorges. The glint of polished metal welcomed him to the flatland.

Beside the mangled wreckage of the Todalla was another ship, new and pristine, but an exact duplicate. Forewarned as he was, Kelland gasped in amazement. As he passed the broken, pitted hull of the Todalla, a twisted something caught in the wreckage drew his eye.

Clad in the tattered rags of space leather, the pitifully broken thing sickened him, and he tried not to look too closely at it. Identification would be impossible at this stage, but he feared what supported suspicion would do to his mind. How long had he remained in the forbidden city of the aliens?

There was a nightmarish unreality about the whole experience.

As if in a dream, he went up the gangplank leading to the ship's control room, slammed shut and sealed the hatch.

Sick with excitement, he tested the manual controls and fuel gauges, then knifed home the jet switches. Response was instant. Rocket tubes flared to sudden life; the hull throbbed with power. With skill born of long training, he blasted off. A series of shocks steadied to a smooth flow of power. Accelerating as rapidly as he dared, Kelland sent the ship roaring up.

Ahead in the visiplate, the sky clouded over, became an opaque canopy of gray, writhing clouds. Weirdly sparkling ghost-lights flickered through the mists. Was the barrier's ionized layer charged with deadly currents of force? Something vaguely remembered sent ugly chills through him.

He tore his attention from the visiplate, opened the throttle wide and braced himself as acceleration built upon itself.

Between him and the visiplate a curious pattern of vivid light stains took shape. Alien thought-images formed in his brain.

"Did you think, Earthman, that you could ever have escaped . . . had I willed you to stay? . . .

"As I had anticipated, decision at the council went against you. It was felt necessary that you be destroyed. Sometimes ruthless destruction of another being is essential to the welfare of a race. But I, perhaps because my intimate contact with you has forever corrupted my judgment, could not concur in the verdict of death. I had given you the idea of escape, partly because I knew your kind so well and realized that you would mistrust any gift from me. To have kept you captive would have meant your death as surely as if we had slain you by your own weapons. And I would not have the stain of violence upon my people, however great the need. So I contrived your escape, watched over you and guided you in safety to the ship. Even the barrier has been de-energized to permit your safe passage.

"Now go, swiftly, and give no thought to your message of warning. It will not be needed. From our distance, we will see that no further thought of exploring Venus comes to your people. Until you, too, have become civilized, it is best that you have no knowledge of our existence.

"When you have passed the barrier, you will forget everything that has happened. . . ."

Like a thundering arrow of metal the rocket ship drove into the barrier, which parted to receive it.

And Kelland forgot. . . .



Conducted by Frederik Pohl

Note: These books are reviewed as a service to you; they are not for sale through Super Science Stories. For information as to publishers' addresses, etc., send a stamped self-addressed envelope to Book Review Editor, in care of this magazine.

FANTASY BOOKSHELF

A Martian Odyssey And Others, by Stanley G. Weinbaum. Fantasy Press.

This is the second volume in the Fantasy Press edition of the complete works of a man who made an immortal science-fiction reputation in seventeen months by the calendar. The present collection includes the title story—Weinbaum's first published story and, according to many critics, his greatest—and eleven others. If you've read any of the Weinbaum stories, you don't have to be told that this is a volume you'll treasure. If you haven't yet come across them—run, do not walk, to your nearest fantasy bookdealer.

The Cosmic Geoids And One Other, by John Taine. Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc.

An entertaining story cast largely in the form of a translation of secret messages found in curious meteorite-like objects hurled at the Earth from another planet. The messages reveal that the Earth is facing an unnamed, but horrible, doom—and nothing can be done about it. Despite its inconclusive ending, "The Cosmic Geoids" will be remembered as one of John Taine's best stories—whereas the other story in the present volume, entitled "The Black Goldfish", is merely silly.

Cybernetics, by Norbert Wiener. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Not fiction, but of definite interest to science-fiction readers, "Cybernetics" is the first book to discuss the human brain, and the "electronic brains" used as calculating machines or as guiding mechanisms in rocket-bombs and torpedoes, as two facets of the same science. If you can by-pass the forbidding solid pages of calculus, you will be rewarded by a large amount of humorous and instructive writing, in which you will find such facts as these:

The symptoms of ataxia and Parkinson's disease in the human body are strictly comparable with the effects of excess feed-back in machines.

A circuit diagram of a machine developed to "read" printed matter for the blind was mistaken for a diagram of the brain's visual cortex by a surgeon.

Shock therapy, as used in the treat-

ment of mental diseases, is strikingly similar to the systems used for restoring function to "deranged" calculating machines.

The jacket of "Cybernetics" claims that it is "a book of vital importance to psychologists, physiologists, electrical engineers, radio engineers, sociologists, philosophers, mathematicians, anthropologists, psychiatrists and physicists"—a listing with which we would quarrel only because it leaves out science-fiction writers, who will be reading it for story ideas, and science-fiction fans, who will be reading it for fun.

Skylark Of Valeron, by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. Fantasy Press.

Third and last novel in the "Skylark" series, this book takes Richard Seaton, Martin Crane, their wives and their faithful Japanese servant, Shiro, on the last leg of their journey into infinite space. In "Skylark of Valeron" the adventurers penetrate the Fourth Dimension and emerge in a galaxy so far removed from our own sector of the universe that the Milky Way is a tiny and unrecognizable path of stars, visible only through the hugest telescopes they can construct. It is hard to conceive of this story being published in a present-day science-fiction magazine, but it remains a story of tremendous scope and hair-raising scientific adventure—and one which belongs in the collection of every fantasy fan.

Fires Burn Blue, by Sir Andrew Caldecott. Longman, Green & Co., Inc.

Thirteen fantasy tales, most of them ghost stories, by a distinguished English writer of the supernatural. Some, like "What's in a Name", are light and humorous; others, like "Grey Brothers," are horror stories. But all are sensitively written and enjoyable to read.

FORTHCOMING FANTASY

Probably the winter of 1949-50 will produce more science-fiction and fantasy books than any other year in the history of the field. For not only are the regular fantasy publishers swinging into high gear, but a number of the large publishing houses are launching ambitious programs. Doubleday & Company's new science-fiction line is spearheaded by two hitherto unpublished novels, Ehrlich's "The Big Eye", the story of what happens when a wandering planetoid threatens to strike the Earth, and a new and untitled novel by Isaac Asimov. Simon & Schuster have Jack Williamson's "The Humanoids" scheduled for August (having postponed it after its review in this column last issue and Will Stewart's "Seetee Shock" lined up for spring publication. E. P. Dutton & Co. will bring out their first science-fiction novel. Fredric Brown's "What Mad Universe," in October; and Frederick Fell, Inc., has an ambitious schedule of original science-fiction novels by Frank Belknap Long and others, as well as two new anthologies, in the works for the fall. Among the smaller publishers specializing in fantasy, The Gnome Press will have George O. Smith's "Pattern for Conquest" and a collection of Nelson S. Bond's short stories, "The 31st of February", in print before the first snow; Fantasy Press has lined up "Seven Out of Time" by the late Arthur Leo Zagat and "The Incredible Planet" by John W. Campbell, Jr.; Shasta Publishers has "Methuselah's Children" by Robert A. Heinlein; and Arkham House will bring out "Selected Letters" of H. P. Lovecraft. All in all, it's going to be a busy reading season for science fictioneers. Better reserve your new fictioneers.

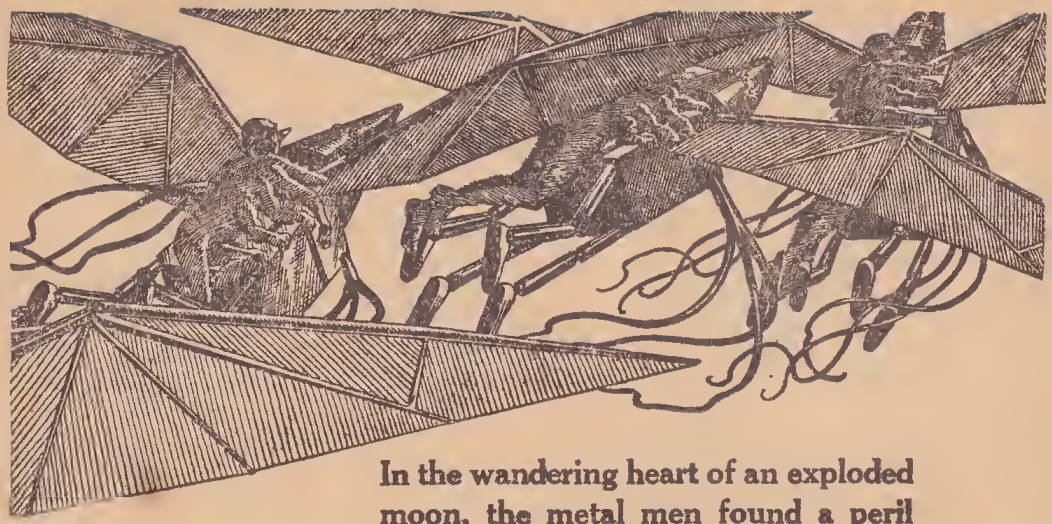
Better reserve your new bifocals immediately!

The METAL MOON

Neil R. Jones



6W-438 stayed behind to fight off the Arnolascs.



In the wandering heart of an exploded moon, the metal men found a peril greater than they had ever faced—the eight-armed Arnolascs of Dwom, who made gods of strangers—and destroyed their gods!

FOREWORD

THE ADVENTURES of Professor Jameson are legion, yet of these only the most interesting are chronicled. Were we to present a complete record of his discoveries and adventures from world to world with the machine men of Zor, such a boundless narration would make for interminable reading, filling many large tomes. Much of this would interest only the scientific savant too absorbed in archeology, mathematics and kindred sciences to appreciate the mystery and romance scattered throughout the records. Let me play the romanticist again, bringing before you the strange discovery made by the machine men among the moonlets of a ringed world.

A word, in passing, about Professor Jameson and the Zoromes. In his Earthly life, it had been the professor's belief that there was no organic dissolution in space, and he selected himself as the subject for his own experiment. He left elaborate instructions and a space rocket when he died. His nephew placed the professor's body in the rocket and shot the projectile into space from the leaning tower in which it lay.

For forty million years, the rocket satellite circled the earth fifty thousand miles distant. The Earth grew old. Mankind had long ago vanished into obscurity. The Earth no longer supported any life. On one of their expeditions into space, the machine men of Zor, a far-off planet in a distant corner of the universe, passed the Earth and discovered the professor's cosmic coffin. Long ago, the Zoromes had transferred their brains from organic bodies to coned metal heads surmounting a cubed body up-

held by four metal legs and equipped with six metal tentacles. Mechanical eyes encircled the coned head, an eye staring directly upward from the apex. Communication they held by mental telepathy. When parts of their bodies wore out, they were replaced. Barring an injury to their heads, the machine men of Zor were immortal.

They recalled to life the professor's brain, placing it in one of the mechanical bodies. He became one of them. They visited many worlds and met with many adventures before the spaceship returned to Zor, where a new expedition was organized under the joint command of Professor Jameson and 744U-21. To the machine men, the professor was known as 21MM392.

CHAPTER ONE

Among the Moonlets

THE ORANGE sun cast a dazzling glitter upon the spaceship of the Zoromes as it approached the ringed planet. Like a massive bracelet of awesome, majestic proportions, the conglomeration of tiny moonlets circled the slowly turning world.

The machine men were heading straight for the ring. From afar, the nearer side of the ring appeared solid. As they came nearer, it seemed comprised of tiny dust motes reflecting the sun's rays in various degrees of brilliance. As they raced closer, the motes grew in perspective to the proportions of pebbles and oddly-shaped boulders. Like a giant ribbon, the ring lay arched across the entire sky before them, a vision of solemn beauty and celestial grandeur.

"There was a world of my own system which had rings," Professor Jameson observed.

"I recall it," 744U-21 replied. "We stopped and examined it in passing. It was later that we visited the Earth and found your rocket satellite."

"Much has befallen you since then, 21MM392," 6W-438 said, "for that was long ago."

The spaceship decelerated rapidly as the ring towered before them like a massive wall. To avoid collisions, they threaded their way cautiously among the moonlets. Many of the small bodies loomed like miniature mountains, while others ranged in size down to tiny pieces which for the most part clung to their larger companions through a slight attraction of gravity. As the spaceship plumbed deeper into the slowly revolving mass, the sunlight became less brilliant, and occasional periods of darkness reigned. Lights were directed from the ship which threaded its way slowly. The darkness grew complete, although now and then a rare stab of sunlight sped like an arrow into the ring, momentarily illuminating a group of moonlets where the ever-shifting and restless sea of cosmic bodies chanced to leave an opening. In spite of their caution, the spaceship occasionally bumped one of the moonlets.

"It seems strange and unreal that these millions of pieces were once a single satellite," said 6W-438.

"This moon you speak of kept revolving closer to its parent body, until the attraction of the planet grew so great that it broke its smaller companion up into these many small pieces," the professor added. "There was a man named Roche—before my time—who drew attention to this universal law."

"What strange shapes many of these chunks possess."

"It comes from occasionally bumping one another. Most of them, you

will notice, conform to a roughly spherical contour. Some of them are oblate. You will notice a marked absence of corners on any of them."

They continued onward through the myriads of moonlets, slowly picking their way and keeping to a slanting course which would carry them edgewise through the ring. Many of the Zoromes gathered scientific data with intricate detectors and other apparatus. Foremost was their analysis of the various minerals to be found in the ring.

"There is a strange metal which is yet far off but plainly registers on our detectors," 454ZQ3 reported.

"Which direction?" 744U-21 asked.

"The ship is now approaching it."

Keeping a close watch upon the detectors, they slowly felt their way along the invisible path of growing emanations.

"We are very close now. It should be here somewhere ahead of us."

"What a queer looking moonlet that one is," 119M-5 remarked, raising a tentacle to designate a bulking object ahead of them.

The machine men instantly recognized a marked difference. The contour of the moonlet departed from the usual rough, spherical appearance. The side towards them was actually flat and smooth, and at least two perfect corners were visible. The coloring of the moonlet also varied from that of its neighbors. As they came closer, 454ZQ2 verified it as the source of the metallic emanations they had picked up, 6W-438 venturing that the moonlet was a huge piece of ore.

"More than that, 6W-438," said the professor as they drifted closer. "It not only appears to be pure metal but designed by an intelligence. See how smooth and regular those two sides are."

They circled the object. Upon the moonlet's antipode an even more surprising discovery was made. A long, square arm projected from the rising bulk of the metal moonlet which they now recognized as almost a perfect cube.

"What can it be?"

The question arose almost in concert from the metal ranks of the machine men. Few ventured to answer it, however. The spaceship maneuvered carefully around the edge of the long projection, gently pushing aside a moonlet whose momentum sent it careening and bumping its nearest companions. The projection ended in a square, flat side upon which were handles and knobs.

"An entrance way!" 6W-438 said excitedly. "It is a way into the—"

Here the machine man paused, finding no mental equivalent for the unknown confronting them.

"We must try to get inside it," said the professor.

A party of five machine men, including the professor, 744U-21, 6W-438, 12-W62 and 284D-167, prepared to attempt an entrance. Temperature equalizers were hastily put over their coned, metal heads, and they were ready to emerge into space. Carrying heat rays dnd other emergency apparatus, they were let out into space, floating gracefully in the direction of the studded entrance to which they clung. To the surprise of them all, the door, or trap, turned back easily once they all laid hold of the grips and turned them. In fact, it seemed almost as if the door had been thrust outward purposely from inside. 12W-62 was ready to enter at once, but the professor deterred him while he shone his body lights into the square, darkened passage. He examined it carefully.

There was another door similar to

the first one, situated halfway up the corridor. They walked down the metal passage and found that the door operated on the same principle as the first. Again, they had no difficulty in opening it. Far ahead, and presumably somewhat inside the great metal cube, was set a third door. They were on their way to this when the second door clanged shut behind them. They advanced no further, sensing a possible trap. 6W-438 went back to examine the second door. He found that it opened easily and saw the mechanical device which had shut it behind them. He allowed it to close again. Satisfied, they proceeded to open the third door.

A DARK chamber lay beyond. They sensed something tangible, something which moved gently past into the corridor behind them.

"A gas—or an atmosphere!" 744U-21 exclaimed. "That is why there were three doors."

"There seems to be little pressure behind it."

In the glow thrown by their body lights, they saw intricate scientific apparatus, some of it fastened, the rest of it floating free. Much of it was unquestionably wrecked. What caught the initial interest of the machine men, however, was the dome which loomed from the floor of the chamber. It was situated in the centre and rose more than halfway to the ceiling. The dome was transparent, and from where they stood the machine men could see dim, misshapen things within it.

They advanced to the dome and shone lights through it. Four weird creatures lay on pallets, apparently lifeless. A strange, glistening crystal-like ice completely covered them, casting back the light into the mechanical eyes of the Zoromes. They saw that the transparent solid covered everything inside the dome and lay many inches thick on the floor of the chamber. In the absence of gravity, this latter fact puzzled the professor.

The four creatures possessed long, angular bodies which were covered with a short fur. Their lower limbs were two in number, while upon their sides the machine men counted four sets of arms, the lowest set the shortest, the others gradually increasing in size and length. Sharp, pointed noses projected grotesquely from otherwise flat faces. Other details were vague.

"There is a way in there," 12W-62 told them, pointing to a transparent door.

"How do you suppose they met their end?"

"They died peacefully, at least," said 744U-21.

It was 284D-167 who opened the transparent door and ventured inside. The others followed. The door, though fitting hermetically, did not close automatically behind them as the last two had done. 744U-21 followed. The others watched from outside.

"What is it?" the professor asked, after 744U-21 had touched the crystal.

"A frozen atmosphere, I would say. We cannot determine its components, however, without a more detailed examination."

"This must have been a spaceship after all," said 12W-62, "and when some accident befell it they died while they slept."

"It does not seem that they would all have been sleeping," the professor suggested. "And how did this ship get in among the moonlets?"

"There is no telling how long it may have drifted. Those four in there may be even older than your own brain, 21MM392."

"Do you think that we can recall them to life?"

"It may be possible."

"The gas which drifted past us when we opened the third door cannot have been the same as that which we see solidified," 6W-438 observed.

"I know. There is much which we must learn about this great cube. If this is a spaceship, it is the strangest one which we have ever found in our travels."

The five machine men eagerly examined the mechanical equipment. Puzzled, they could find no propellant mechanism, although means of creating a synthetic atmosphere supply was disccovered and readily understood. The more detailed their examination became, the more certain they were that the great metal cube with its long-necked entrance was not a spaceship. 744U-21 suggested that it might have been an interplanetary station maintained by creatures of this system for observation or other purposes. It had eventually drifted among the moonlets or else it had been stationed there.

One thing still troubled them. The floor was not equipped with any means of synthetic gravity.

"One of these machines now in disuse may have supplied it," 744U-21 offered.

"Look!" cried 6W-438 suddenly, waving his metal tentacles in wild excitement toward the dome. "Something is happening to the solidified atmosphere!"

In surprise, they saw the crystal substance slowly in motion, moving within itself, slowly expanding its state changing.

"It is changing to liquid form!"

Fascinated, they watched. They saw the dripping liquid slowly disappearing, evaporating into gas.

"The temperature here is rising!" said 6W-438.

"We must have set a heating unit to working," said the professor. "At this rate, the atmosphere will soon return to its normal condition."

The change of the crystal to liquid and then to gas became more rapid. Soon, it had entirely disappeared. The four silent figures were now free of the encumbering crystal and became subject to the gentle examination and probing of the machine men.

Professor Jameson and 744U-21 looked at each other in quick surprise as they reached the same conclusion.

"These creatures are not dead as we know death!"

"Their life forces are in suspension, then. Their life is of that character which we occasionally meet with in our travels. For one thing, they are not warm-blooded."

"Call 141L-14. He is best familiar with these conditions."

CHAPTER TWO

Resurrection

FROM time to time, the machine men had radiated their discoveries to those within the spaceship. Now, they called to 141L-14. With seven more of the machine men, 141L-14 entered the cube by way of the long corridor with its airlocks.

"No, they are not really dead," he said. "Their life forces have been suspended, much as we have known creatures frozen in ice to return to life when thawed out."

"Will they live again?"

"21MM392 was once dead, and his brain was made to live again," said 744U-21, "so why should we not be able to exert our art on these creatures of indefinite life suspension and return

their entire bodies to normal functioning?"

"They have air, now, such as they knew, and they have heat," said 141L-14, "but there is no way of knowing how long they have remained like this. They may never return to life unaided, or it may be some time. Before attempting any aid, we should first be patient and watch to see what happens."

The suggestions of 141L-14 were acted upon, the machine men maintaining a tireless vigil. Finally, 141L-14 attempted revival by means of stimulants, mechanical stimulation of the respiratory movement and other physical processes, besides introducing nourishment intravenously and intramuscularly. Reactions of the creatures were favorable, proving 141L-14's contention that they needed but little help.

The first signs of the reawakening were scattered, miasmic impressions on the machine men's brains, strange memories hopelessly muddled with fantastic imaginings. The machine men derived no practical information from these mental vagaries and watched for a more clarified understanding.

The creatures' minds wandered less, their mental processes throwing off the fog of chaos. One of the creatures opened its eyes and stared blankly a moment before bringing objects into focus. Puzzlement as to his whereabouts assailed the creature first of all. A low mutter of gibberish accompanied the thought, rising to a sharp inflection. This, the machine men were unable to interpret, yet they knew the thought which prompted the words.

The creature saw them, yet he did not seem to be able to consider them coherently. He thought them figments of his imagination, realizing rather vaguely that he had slept for a long time. He seemed to realize the presence of someone by him, however, for his thoughts suggested as much.

"So you have come back for us. What is the verdict? Has the pestilence been conquered? Or has it passed and taken civilization with it?"

"We do not know," Professor Jameson radiated into the creature's mind. "Perhaps you can tell us more about it."

"Tell you more?" chattered the creature in voluble surprise and indignation. It is for you to tell! We know nothing that has happened since we were left here on Yriid! Where are your tongues? Why do you not say something? But you did say something! I know what you said, yet I cannot recall hearing it! How strange!"

At this point, the creature raised a paw and rubbed his face, especially around his eyes which were so deep-set as to give him a rather sombre appearance. Then he stared silently at them, suddenly realizing that what he saw was no figment of his imagination but was really true.

His mind suggested madness. He looked around at his companions. Two of them were revived and were looking at the machine men in surprise. He who had come to his senses first was becoming better oriented. His next remark suggested as much.

"Robots. We must have lain here many years. What kind of a world is it now? They send robots to bring us back to our own world. Are we no longer among the greatest brains of our planet, to be treated so lightly by metal proxy? And why have they not come for us before?"

He turned and spoke to his companions. A brief conversation followed. The last one was emerging from his coma. Then he turned once more to the machine men of Zor.

"Take us home," he said. "How long

have we remained inert and asleep here?"

"Perhaps for ages," 744U-21 replied. "Who knows? As for our being robots belonging to your people, you are mistaken. We shall be glad to transport you to your world when we know where it is."

Bewilderment akin to terror swept the minds of the creatures. "Who are you? Where are you from?"

"We are not robots, though we are nearly so," 744U-21 explained to them. "An organic brain directs each of our metal bodies. We are from a world far distant from your planetary system."

They stared in speechless amazement. "Then the pestilence must have conquered! Our world may be a dead world!"

"We do not know, for we have not visited any worlds in this system as yet. Our first interest was the ring of moonlets, and then we discovered your space terminal, or whatever it is."

"Moonlets? Space terminal? What do you mean? This sounds like madness!"

"Perhaps if you tell us how you came here we can help you understand things better," Professor Jameson offered. "You spoke of a pestilence and suggested that you four who were greatly advanced in education on your world were to be isolated from it until it passed. Then, someone was to return here and get you. Was that not so?"

"Why, yes—of course! We were buried on Yriid in a sealed chamber."

FLASHES of understanding radiated among the Zoromes. The story was commencing to reveal itself to their practical minds.

"What is Yriid?" the professor asked. "A world other than your own?"

"We are scientists from Dwom. Yriid is the satellite of Dwom."

"How far is this moon from Dwom?" the machine man inquired. "Give us the general characteristics of your home world."

The scientist of Dwom answered the questions promptly, adding a query of his own. "Why do you not ask me about this moon?"

"Because this is no moon any longer. Your chamber is floating in space in the dark depths of millions of moonlets encircling Dwom at less than three-quarters of the distance you stated the orbit of Yriid to be. Your description of Dwom quite accurately describes the world this world encircles."

"It—it cannot be!" one of them exclaimed. "It would mean more than a hundred thousand years since we were left here!"

"See, Reyadip!" one of the first speaker's companions addressed him. "It is as I said would happen! Yriid broke up!"

"One hundred thousand years!" breathed Reyadip. "It it wonderful we are still alive!"

"Many things could have happened to our civilization," said another of the creatures. "We may find a superrace on our world."

Reyadip shook his head. "A superrace would have found us. The pestilence must have wiped out our species. That is why no one returned for us."

"Let us go with these metal beings who have found us," said one. "They will take us back to our world."

Reyadip arose experimentally from his pallet and placed his feet on the floor. Weakness and lack of gravity caused him to lose his balance. 6W-438 leaped forward and caught him. The four scientists of Dwom were told how they had been revived after the frozen air had returned to a gaseous state, and they were warned to be careful until their condition was improved.

The machine men decided to tow

the sealed chamber to Dwom. There was no air inside the spaceship suited to these creatures, for what air remained was from the last world the machine men had visited and was unbreathable. With the freeing of the air in the chamber from a solid state, the right pressure had again been reached, or nearly so. Reyadip thought it rarified, and so the machine men in the chamber did not leave to go aboard the spaceship, for use of the airlocks freed a portion of the atmosphere each time.

"How damaged all our apparatus is," Reyadip said, looking about the inside of the chamber. "The atmosphere plant is wrecked.

"We shall be on your world very soon," the professor assured him. "There is little chance of this air becoming too stale to breathe before then."

While the spaceship slowly guided the metal chamber out of the moonlets, much was learned from the four scientists. They were skilled in all fields of science and education, and when the pestilence had come and had promised to be of appalling proportions, the four of them had banded together in this scheme of lying dormant until it was past. Various governmental agencies had cooperated with them, wishing to spare their useful lives if it were possible. Besides Reyadip, there were Gnarst, Ebynth and Torfg.

The Agrids, as they were called, had listened in awe to the subdued bumping sounds they had heard as the spaceship drew their sealed chamber out of the ring of moonlets. They were subsequently surprised to find the trip to Dwom over so quickly, for most of the time had been spent in threading cautionsly among the little moons which had once been the great satellite of Yriid.

Their first intimation of an approach to Dwom was a growing sensation of gravity. The professor issued a mental warning to 20R-654 aboard the spaceship against any twisting and turning, since the metal chamber possessed no artificial gravity.

Dwom's attraction grew stronger, and they were told that a landing would soon be effected. They were warned of a shift in gravity, and they seized hold of stationary objects before it came. The chamber was lowered to the ground. It touched with a shaking bump and rolled over on one side, then lay still.

"Now you can find out what changes your world has undergone," said the professor. "Let a few of us precede you to see that all is well."

Machine men and Agrids made their way out of the long entrance past the airlocks. The first thing the Agrids noticed was the great ring around their planet. Exclamations flew thick and fast.

"How beautiful it is!"

"And it was once our moon!"

"You have been revolving in that ring about Dwom for a long time," said 744U-21. "There is no telling how long ago Yriid broke up."

"The sun has lost some of its heat," Reyadip observed.

"Yes, it is probable," Professor Jameson agreed, "even though you may be a bit closer to the sun than formerly."

"The vegetation has changed," said Torfg, bringing their attention to things nearer at hand, "The sward is not like that we knew, and the bushes are different—and the trees—what strange bark and leaves!"

"Where are we?" queried Reyadip, turning to the machine men. "On what part of the planet did we land?"

"Sixteen degrees north of the

equator," 28A-155 replied, using the Agrids' own terminology. "We are near the eastern shore of a continent some four thousand miles across and six thousand miles long."

"Paxt," muttered Torfg. "We must be somewhere near the city of Afg."

"Let us go into the ship," the professor suggested. "Then we can course around the world, and you can see what changes time has wrought. You may be able to come to some approximation of the time which has passed since your companions isolated you from the pestilence."

The Agrids regarded the spaceship of the Zoromes in wonder and admiration. Once inside, they marveled at the scientific apparatus which they vowed surpassed that of their own period.

"We were less than a century beyond the inception of space flying. We travelled occasionally to Yriid, and a few times expeditions returned safely from our two nearest sister worlds. Mrrn, the inner world, we planned to colonize."

"We plan to explore the other worlds of this system," said 744U-21, "but right now we are more interested in this world of yours."

THE SPACESHIP cruised slowly about Dwom, first high and then low. The Agrids chattered excitedly among themselves as they gazed down at the changes which time had made in the outlines of the continents. When they found their bearings, the ship was dropped sufficiently low for them to search with the telescopes. The great cities were gone.

It was 41C-98 who first saw signs of civilization. The machine man saw a small village of queer houses. Speeding along and coming nearer the ground, they picked out several more of the villages.

The Agrids became very eager to land and meet the inhabitants. Gnarst sounded a warning possibility. "This world may be peopled by a different race, sprung up since our entombment."

"Or perhaps they are creatures from another world."

"The last seems unlikely, for their habitations do not suggest an intelligence capable of spacetravel," said 6W-438.

The spaceship came to rest not far from one of the villages. They saw no one. From on high, indistinct signs of life and movement had been perceived. The Agrids and nearly a score of the machine man left the ship and walked toward the village.

The houses were crude and suggested a barbaric civilization. Warning the Agrids that they might be attacked, the machine men surrounded them protectingly as they penetrated the queer, winding avenues of the village. Several of the machine men reported fleeting glimpses of watching eyes from the cover of the houses. Presently a subdued whispering arose and surrounded them, spreading through the village like a soft, sighing breeze, quickly it subsided.

Professor Jameson was about to issue a mental overture of friendship to the hidden inhabitants, when 6W-438 called the attention of all. "Look! Coming down that avenue over there!"

All eyes were focused in the direction the machine man indicated. What they saw were strange counterparts of the four Agrids. Fully a dozen of the things advanced slowly, armed with long clubs. Each one also held a rough piece of stone fastened by a long cord to the club. They were dressed in strange harnesses, part metal and part leather. Iron loops, welded to their breast plates, circled their heads.

"There are your descendants!" 744U-21 told the wide-eyed Agrids. "It would seem that they are no super-race; rather, it would seem that your species has degenerated."

"There are more of them coming from the opposite direction," said 119M-5.

As the machine men and Agrids looked around, they saw the villagers advancing grimly and purposefully from all directions. As the creatures came nearer, marked differences between them and the Agrids became noticeable. Their fur was lighter in color, and they seemed shorter. Their eyes were not so deep-set as those of the Agrids, while their two lower sets of arms were stronger and more developed.

The machine men recognized that the inhabitants of the village were driven more by fear than by animosity. "Be not afraid of us," the professor radiated. "We do not come to harm you or do any damage to your village."

The moving ranks stopped instantly in consternation and perplexity at this voice which had spoken to them without sound. They saw strange thought pictures, too, which demonstrated the invincible qualities of the machine men against their clubs and whirling stones. The machine men were firmly clustered around the four Agrids, and for the moment the latter were not visible to their armored descendants.

A strange jabber of words totally unintelligible to the four Agrids issued from the mouths of the villagers. Reading the thoughts behind the words, the machine men interpreted queries regarding their origin, who they were and what they were doing in the village. As well as he could, the professor explained to them what they wanted to know, finally alluding to the four Agrids.

"We have brought to you four of your ancestors from the dim, dark past who have survived in a strange manner."

The machine men drew back to let the villagers see the Agrids. Instantly, an excited hubbub arose. The machine men acted as interpreters for the Agrids. They learned but little of the history of their descendants, but they did learn that there was a slightly higher civilization in other parts of the world and that boats plied the ocean.

The Agrids became more hopeful. Meanwhile, they found themselves accepted as prophets and deities and were offered the best of everything. The machine men were accepted as mechanical minions who served the Agrids. As long as everything went smoothly, both machine men and Agrids were content to let matters stand.

The Agrids set to work learning the language of their descendants. They visited nearby villages and learned that all over Dwom religion was closely linked with government,— in fact was a part of government. The Arnolascs, as these distant descendants of the Agrids called themselves, worshipped many deities, reminding Professor Jameson of the old Greeks of his own race. Their religion and customs were very strict, and any who opposed them in any way were promtly outlawed and banished from the communities. There were many such, they learned, who, having no rights or protection, banded together in difficult, inaccessible places to establish their own communities and escape persecution and assassination. The Agrids found the government heads strictly opposed to any progressive move which ran counter to their religion.

In the spaceship of the Zoromes, the Agrids journeyed all over the world, hailed as near-gods and prophets, find-

ing themselves liberally exploited by the priesthood to uphold the faith of the people. They found the more advanced centres still far below their own standard of civilization.

They traveled, said little and learned much until it became quite evident to them wherever they went that the world was laboring under a severe superstitious restraint. Once they realized this, they commenced using the veneration and respect accorded them as a means for enlightenment and mild reform. They urged laxity toward those holding contrary beliefs, urged, and suggested pardons for those already outlawed. But they met resentment and determined opposition, mostly from the priesthood.

Many of the machine men were for exploring the rest of the planets. The professor elected to stay with the Agrids until the spaceship returned, and when he called for four volunteers to remain on Dwom, 6W-438, 119M-5, 29G-75 and 75J-02 were first to respond. The spaceship left the machine men and Agrids in one of the principal cities and headed sunward.

NOT MANY days after the spaceship had left, reports commenced filtering into the Arnolasc city that the Agrids were no gods but devils. It was also said that they were minions of the outlawed, self-styled intellectuals, the Uans, who had fashioned the machine men to fight for overthrow of the government, after the morale of the people had been lowered by subtle suggestions from the Agrids. It was reported that the spaceship had not left the planet as so many gullible people believed, but had gone to bring back more machine men and spaceships from an area deep within a nearby continent of vast swamplands. These accusations were backed by an assertion that the Agrids had spread sickness behind them wherever they had gone. At first, such reports were taken as mere rumor; later, they aroused speculation and concern, especially when an epidemic broke out in the city where they were established.

"It would seem that there may be something to this theory of your spreading sickness," the professor told the Agrids. "Do you suppose that it is germs of the pestilence? You could easily have carried germs into your sealed chamber, these same germs later coming to life and activity when we brought you to Dwom."

The Agrids seized the first opportunity to examine some of the cases. They disproved part of the machine man's theory while establishing the rest.

"This malady has in truth been spread by us," said Reyadip, "but it is not the terrible pestilence. Such possibilities were guarded against scientifically. We took no active germs of the pestilence into our sealed chamber, but we evidently took other germs with us, as these cases prove. This disease has not the fatal effects of the pestilence which swept our world. In fact, the people of my time rarely suffered at all from this malady, probably because our bodies had built up resistance against it. These people will soon recover."

Nevertheless, consternation gripped the Arnolases. The terror was fanned into malice by the priesthood, who were envious of the fame and enthusiasm accorded the Agrids. At a public meeting, the Agrids tried to explain conditions and circumstances of the disease which had followed in their wake, but a rumbling roar of anger never quieted long enough for them to be heard.

Reyadip despaired. The few machine

men were kept busy protecting the four Agrids from the violence of the mob, nor would they have succeeded had it not been for the Arnolascs' superstitious fear of the Agrids, which had not entirely worn off. It was well, as the professor remarked, that their quarters were in a round, stone tower on a bluff overlooking the city. Behind them, a dense forest stretched for many miles to the seashore. If they plan violence, we are well situated to be warned in time. We must remain vigilant."

"What can we do against so many?" asked Gnarst. "They can even overwhelm five machine men like yourselves."

"Yes," the professor admitted. "But if the worst happens, we have mechanical wings left us by the spaceships. We can fly with you to a spot of refuge in the forest."

The Agrids remained disappointed and despondent. Their hopes of a superrace had been dashed completely.

One day, not long after the ineffectual address of the Agrids, three Arnolascs came to the stone tower on the bluff. They came, they said, as agents for those who had been banished and dwelt on the continent of the swamplands.

Word had reached the communities of the Uans in the depths of the great morass about the coming of the Agrids and their mechanical aids. The Uans of the volcanic city of Pteth, more learned and progressive than the Arnolascs of true belief, were interested in the four creatures who claimed that they were ancients. Word had reached them of the attempted teachings of the Agrids, and it had so pleased the outlaws to hear that the Agrids had risen to their defense that they were offering them a welcome to their city, wishing to confer with them and learn of the past and many other things.

CHAPTER THREE

The Attack on Pteh

"WE HAVE suspected a glorious past in far-gone days, for we found many hints by digging and finding old ruins," one of the outlaws told them. "We have even found petrified bones, and I must say that you four appear somewhat like the plastic reconstructions they have inspired us to fashion from them. We have believed that we may have declined from a superrace, for from time to time are born individuals who show extreme advancement from the usual types. Generally, one of three things happens to them. If they rise to the front, assert themselves and follow the lines of truth and logic, they are banished as outlaws. If they remain quiet and discreet and do not betray any radical tendencies, submitting to the bigotry of state religion and custom, they are unmolested. If they are unscrupulous as well as ambitious and intelligent, they sometimes become government heads or religious dignitaries, receiving a part of the confiscated goods and property of those banished to outlawry."

Agrids, machine men and the three Uans from Pteth conversed together for a long time. The Uans were intensely interested in the machine men and how they had rescued the four Agrids from the ring which had once been the satellite Yriid. Professor Jameson learned that the sinking continent of the swamplands was comparatively near, lying just across the straits from the forest behind them. Pteth lay inland. Other cities and villages of the Uans lay farther from the

coast, but Pteth was the nearest and one of the largest of the outlawed communities.

"You must be amazingly old," the Agrids were told. "Our scientists estimate that Yriid broke up as long as sixty thousand years ago."

The Agrids were anxious to leave for Pteth, but the machine men urged them to wait until the spaceship returned, arguing that they were such prominent figures in the eyes of the Arnolascs that they would never be allowed unhindered passage to the land of the Uans. Reyadip regretfully recognized the wisdom of this advice. Meanwhile, two of the three Uans set out for their return to Pteth, while the other remained in the city as a spy.

The Agrids, like all organic creatures, had periods of sleep, and, according to the usual routine of civilizations the universe over, did their sleeping during the planetary periods of darkness. The machine men never slept. Mental lassitude, or deep introspection was their nearest approach to sleep.

It proved well for the Agrids that the machine men did not sleep, and perhaps for the machine men themselves. The attack which the professor had feared soon came, but not the way he had expected. Instead of rising against them in a howling mob, attackers came in a small party, by night and by stealth from the dense forest to the rear of the tower. Whatever their intentions may have been toward the almost invincible Zoromes, their design upon the Agrids was plainly assassination.

Somehow or other, they contrived to get inside the tower despite the protection of locks and bars. There were ten or more of the assassins, and they were inside the tower before the machine men and Agrids were aware of their presence.

The first intimation that they were there reached 75J-02, who became troubled by vague mental radiations unlike those of the Agrids. Prompt investigation was none too soon.

The marauders wielded curved daggers shaped for decapitation. Torfg had a close call as he was awakend by the clattering din of the running machine men. One of the assassins made a quick stab at him which was partly blocked by 6W-438, who instantly crushed the Arnolasc in the embrace of his metal tentacles.

Most of the others met similar fates, but a few escaped. One of them carried a bar of metal and slashed desperately at 75J-02 when attacked. There were a few nicks, dents and scratches on the machine man's body, but that was all. Examination of the dead Arnolascs revealed several individuals wearing the insignia of the priesthood.

"More trouble will come of this," said Reyadip. "None of them should have escaped."

Reyadip was right, and the trouble came with the dawn. Several officials came to the tower, and accused the four Agrids of murder. This, together with their spreading of a malign epidemic, called for the forfeit of their lives. They were to be given a hearing, and the evidence was to be weighed, but they could expect no mercy.

All the entrances to the round tower were locked and barred, and the machine men hastily donned the mechanical wings left them when 744U-21 had departed with the spaceship. Word of their arrest had evidently spread through the city, for thousands of the Arnolascs were hurrying up the bluff, and the city streets were swarming with them, eager to see what would happen when those who called themselves ancients were taken into custody.

The machine men were none too soon in fastening on the mechanical wings, for as they hurried to the roof of the tower they heard the city officials smashing their way inside the tower on the ground floor.

With the exception of 6W-438, each machine man carried an Agrid in his flight. 6W-438 stayed momentarily to fight off several Arnolascs emerging upon the roof. One he knocked over the roof's edge into the milling throng beneath, forcing the others to give way before his flailing tentacles. One of them leaped upon him as he took off to join his winging comrades. More of the Arnolascs swarmed upon the roof. Professor Jameson, carrying Reyadip, turned back to his aid, but 6W-438 won clear. The Arnolasc still clung to him, hacking frantically with a knife, finally shivering the nicked blade into several pieces which fell sparkling amid the surging populace beneath.

Missiles commenced to fly among the machine men carrying the Agrids, and they soared higher. 6W-438 dropped the Arnolasc and flew to join them, his victim catapulting to the ground. The machine men considered themselves temporarily safe, for the Arnolascs knew nothing of aircraft.

Over the forest they headed in the general direction of the sea, leaving the city far behind. For a long time, they could see the tower on the bluff, and then that too melted into a horizon of haze and obscurity. The four Agrids, frightened at first, gradually became calmer.

Passing above a village, they were surprised by a volley of missiles. One of them struck the flying apparatus of 29G-75. 6W-438 quickly flew to his aid and took the Agrid, giving the machine man more power to recover. After several ineffectual attempts, 29G-75 managed to rise and fly even with his companions once more. Another volley flew by them, a large rock ricocheting off the metal body of the professor.

"The elastic guns," said Torfg, recalling the stone throwing machines of the Arnolascs. "They have relayed messages from the city with notes from their pipes."

"How far are we from the coast?" the professor asked.

Reyadip computed a distance of approximately fifty miles.

"Let us fly across the straits to Pteth. We shall not be safe in the forest if they are determined to follow us."

The suggestion was agreed upon, and they kept on until they saw the open sea, carefully skirting all communities they passed. Reaching the coast, they struck out toward the sea. A large seaport town lay to their left, and Reyadip drew their attention to several ships which were leaving port He expressed the opinion that they were being pursued.

THEY were well out of sight of land when 29G-75 commenced to have trouble with his flying apparatus, which had been damaged by a flying stone from one of the elastic guns. He continually lost altitude. Suddenly he lost all control and dove into the sea. Under the circumstances, there was nothing his companions could do for him. He sank to the bottom and reported an estimated depth of a hundred and fifty feet or more.

"Remain there until the spaceship returns," said the professor.

There was no cause for alarm, the machine men assured the Agrids, for machine men had remained under water for long periods before this. They flew onward.

The coast of the sinking continent appeared as a purple line on the hor-

izon. It was low and swampy; rank vegetation marked the coastline, growing up out of the water. Numerous bays and inlets cut into the log bogs of the interior. A stream wound ar twisted away into distance.

For many long miles there was litth to look upon but vegetation and water, and then the terrain grew firmer and a little higher. There were many lakes After this, the morass began once more. Reyadip expressed his opinion that what they had passed was in effect an island of solid ground.

They gained altitude in order to lo cate Pteth, but the Agrids soon com plained of the cold, and so they went no higher. Leaving 119M-5 and 6W-438 with a triple burden between them, Professor Jameson flew alone on high. Far off in the interior, he spied a slight rise in the surface of the marsh. Re turning to his companions, he carried Reyadip again, and they continued on their way. Soon the mound came in sight. It had been barely perceptible to the professor, but now as they came closer it broadened into vast propor tions. A city lay inside high walls.

From that distance, they could se tiny figures running excitedly alon the walls. Something long and glitter ing was turned in their direction. They learned later that it was a telescope

Pteth lay upon a lava foundation Most of the houses in the city were built of the same material. The larger buildings were built of stone hauled from across the straits by boat. A nar row, winding stream, the same on they had seen near the coast, passe through the swamp.

They flew above the city, circlin it once and then dropping to what ap peared to be a public square. They were recognized and heartily wel comed. All about them they saw marks of progress foreign to the Arnolasc cities they had visited, this in spite of the fact that these outlaws had less to work with and were surrounded by adverse conditions. The fugitives told them of the boats they had seen leaving the seaport city across the straits. The Uans did not seem alarmed. They calmly went about making preparations for a siege.

"They have tried taking Pteth before but have always been repulsed. Their greatest enemy is the swampland. They soon become sick and many of them die," said one of the Uan spokesmen.

Scouts were sent downstream. Meanwhile, the four Agrids were given medicinal preparations to protect them against the diseases of the swamps. The machine men examined the defenses of Pteth and found that the outlawed intellectuals had mastered a rather effective explosive. It was used mostly in grenades, although there were a few cylinders similar to crude cannon which were used but rarely, because they eventually burst or backfired, killing their operators. The Uans marveled at the heat ray installed in the professor's fore-tentacle.

Three days later the scouts returned and reported that a large flotilla of boats was coming up the stream in single file. They were loaded with armored soldiers from the continent across the straits. From the shelter of the bogs, the scouts had seen many large elastic guns. Each soldier was armed with cutlery of several types, and each one carried a flame thrower.

Inquiring as to the nature of the flame throwers, the professor learned that the Arnolasc were experts at throwing large, heavy capsules of oil specially prepared to burst into flames on contact with the air. The Uans had first invented this trick, but they found the grenades more effective. Neverthe-

less, to be struck with one of the capsules generally meant a flaming death.

"Their advantage is their huge numbers. If we can throw back their early attacks successfully, we have a good chance. Reinforcements will join us from our strongholds deeper inland. We could retreat to them, but we do not want Pteth to fall. It is very important to us. When the swamp sickness overcomes them, we shall hold the advantage."

Scouts came in two days later to report that the Arnolascs were moving up on Pteth overland, dragging and carrying their elastic guns.

"They could be waylaid with devastating effects," the professor suggested.

"But we would lose some of our numbers, too, and we cannot afford to let them find the city inadequately defended."

The Arnolascs came into sight and surrounded the city. They demanded its surrender. The Uans refused, nor did they show any signs of acquiescence when it was cautiously suggested that the Agrids and the machine men be the price of peace.

The next move of the Arnolascs was to move closer and set their elastic guns into place. Powerful strands of rubber were stretched back and cocked by scores of the creatures. A boulder was inserted, aimed and let go, the missile hurtling among the houses and citizenry with crushing effect. Although there were few casualties, considerable damage was done.

THE UANS retaliated to this first offensive move with a barrage of grenades accurately thrown at a number of Arnolascs who were sneaking up with flame balls. These created fearful havoc, killing so many that few of the flame balls were thrown, and these were ineffectual. Most of The Arnolasc were ignorant of the grenades and became demoralized until their leaders took them in hand. The elastic guns were quickly drawn out of range of the grenades and continued to hurl heavy stones into the city.

"Have you any mechanical means of throwing the grenades?" 6W-438 asked.

"Yes—we have elastic guns of various types, but we cannot use the grenades, for the siege may be a long one. We are using them only at close range."

The Uans were right; the siege promised to be a long one. Again and again the Arnolascs rushed the walls and were repulsed. The grenades were always effectual in repelling the enemy, but were becoming scarce. The flame balls were thrown into the city from time to time, sometimes at random but more often at the Uans on the walls during a charge. The machine men saw them strike individuals who became living funeral pyres.

Dead Arnolascs lay mangled and torn amid shattered vegetation outside the city. Creatures of the swamp slunk up out of the slime at night to feed in the fitful glow of the night torches, often dragging their victims, or fragments of them, down into the muck out of sight.

The four machine men did excellent work as sentinels. Not only were they sleepless, tireless and eternally vigilant, but they searched out any unusual mental activity of approaching forces. They had no fear of the flame bombs. Several times they were struck, and the oil flamed all over their metal bodies, yet they remained uninjured. One of the elastic guns picked 119M-5 off the wall one day, damaging two metal tentacles, but the machine man climbed back up again undaunted. The

Arnolascs' cry of enthusiasm died half-uttered.

Reinforcements of Arnolascs constantly refilled the positions of those slain. Never before, so the Uans said, had a siege been so long or so bitterly contested as this one. Swamp sickness finally broke out among the Arnolascs, but the cases were fewer and shorter than ever before. An antidote had evidently been discovered.

The allies the Uans had expected from the communities further inland did not come. The professor flew to the nearest village to find out the cause. A large force of Arnolasc waited outside the walls, holding back their assault, yet ready to prevent reinforcements leaving for Pteth. The professor returned to the besieged city and reported the conditions.

"If we can only hold them off until the spaceship returns, there will be no question as to the outcome," said 6W-438.

A few reinforcements did come from the farther communities not patrolled by Arnolascs. They gained access to Pteth by night under escort of the machine men. The latter shot down many of the Arnolasc with their ray guns which were effectual only at close range. The professor often wondered about 29G-75 at the bottom of the straits but knew that he must be safe and trying to be patient.

The supply of grenades grew so low that they were used only in the most desperate of crises. Hand-to-hand combats became common. In these, the machine men worked terrible havoc, flying above the heads of the Arnolascs and wielding their ray guns with devastating effect, or fighting on the ground where they were not prominent targets for the elastic guns.

One of the enemy gunners disabled the mechanism of 119M-5, and they nearly carried the machine man off a prisoner. The other Zoromes and Uans fought hard and rescued him, robbing the Arnolascs of a great moral victory.

More bitter fighting followed. It was feared that the city would fall, so one night the machine men under cover of darkness carried the Agrids to Ropth, another city of the Uans farther inland.

The next day, reinforcements came to strengthen the Arnolascs. Knowing the state of affairs in Pteth, they made a desperate, wholesale charge upon the city, coming over the walls in an overwhelming rush which could not be repelled.

Outnumbered twenty to one, the Uans were subdued along with the machine men. Both 119M-5 and 6W-438 were disabled in the fighting, and 75J-02 and the professor were soon captured in spite of the terrific cost of life to the Arnolascs. They never had a chance to put on their mechanical wings, the charge had come so unexpectedly.

Although the Arnolascs searched everywhere, the Agrids were not to be found, and even when threatened with torture the Uans refused to tell where they were. Realizing the futility of further secrecy, Professor Jameson spared his organic friends by telling the Arnolascs that the four Agrids were safe in another city of the Uans. He warned them, too, of what would happen to them when the spaceship returned, especially if any machine man were harmed.

The Arnolascs, flushed with victory, ignorantly confident of their might and divine right, expressed their contempt and curiosity both at once by dismantling the machine men. The tentacles and legs were taken off; then they discovered how to unfasten the heads from the bodies. The heads lay

helpless and saw from many eyes the patient and finally successful efforts of the Arnolascs to get the cubes apart and make junk of the inner mechanisms.

They feared what would happen when the conquerors should start on the heads. More than ever, the machine men hoped for the coming of the spaceship.

THAT night, the four heads were thrilled and startled by a clear, mental call from outside the walls of Pteth. At first, they thought that it might be the return of the spaceship, but they were even more astonished when they learned that it was 29G-75 whom they had left at the bottom of the straits. His story was quickly told in reply to their concerted query.

"One of the Arnolascs ships lowered anchor near me. I held to the anchor and was pulled up with it. I clung to the ship beneath the water level and was brought into port. I came upstream holding to the bottom of one of their small boats. From the minds of the Arnolascs, I have learned of all that has happened."

"And you are uninjured?"

"All except my mechanical wings, and you knew about them."

"Get us out of the city," Professor Jameson instructed him. "We are now but a collection of heads. They have torn our bodies to pieces. At present, they have tired of the sport, but it is in their minds to dissasemble our heads next."

The thought was well timed. The Arnolascs came, seven in number, and thoughtfully looked at the coned heads, regarding the shuttered eyes with curiosity. One of the creatures promptly poked out one of 75J-02's mechanical eyes with a metal rod, looking for a purchase with which to tear off the outer covering of the head. Another hurled 6W-438's head to the floor so hard that his brain was stunned.

"Hurry, 29G-75!" Professor Jameson radiated as an Arnolasc turned his head over speculatively, first raising and then lowering the eye shutters. "They are tampering with our heads!"

"Guide me! I am coming!"

Another of the Arnolascs entered with an iron which he jabbed into an eye socket of 6W-438, who had not yet regained consciousness and was unaware of his peril. A dull clatter of metal sounded against lava pavement, and into the room burst 29G-75, his ray gun spurting quick death among the Arnolascs, cutting short several raucous screams.

Hastily, he gathered up the four heads and raced out of the building, bowling over two more of the Arnolascs who came running in answer to the cries of alarm. Straight for the city wall he rushed. Behind followed cries of consternation and warning. Advice was hurled to those blocking 29G-75's passage. Metal tentacles and a flaming ray gun disposed of them, and 29G-75 was up a set of steps and over the wall.

He raced for the bogs, and not until they were beyond pursuit and at the bottom of a deep pool of water did he stop. Meanwhile, 6W-438 recovered consciousness and learned of his close call.

Many days passed before the gladdening radiations of machine men of Zor broke in upon their mental conversation. The spaceship had returned. 744U-21 had learned of all that had happened in the Arnolasc city. The machine men had then come to Pteth and had been told of the flight of a machine man carrying the four heads. From on high in the spaceship, they

had scoured the surrounding swamplands with a thought amplifier, finally locating the five machine men.

The spaceship landed in the bog, crushing down vegetation both great and small. Out of the pool strode 29G-75, his tentacles curled carefully about the four heads of his metal brethren. In the spaceship, the heads of the four machine men were fastened onto new bodies which were equipped with metal legs and tentacles. Repairs and replacements were made to their mechanical eyes, and they were soon as good as new.

Returning to Pteth, the machine men ordered the Arnolascs out of the city and back to their own continent. When the conquerors refused, the machine men loosed such a tremendous burst of power upon their encampments in the swamp that they immediately yielded.

Having restored Pteth, they next found the Agrids and came back to Pteth. A general council was held at which 744U-21 st forth a plan to the Agrids and their allies, the Uans.

"Why not colonize the nearby world of Mrrn? There you can live as you wish. Some day, you may be able to return here and guide this world to a better way of living. We shall be glad to move you there in as many trips as it may require of our spaceship. We have explored Mrrn, and it is a wonderful world, well suited to all your living requirements."

The Agrids and Uans were not long in accepting the offer. Both envisioned a near-Utopia such as the Agrids had described as having existed prior to their entombment during the pestilence.

"I wonder," the professor radiated when all had been transported to their new planet, "what new wonders wait for us in the next star system?"

"As long as you are able to appreciate wonders," 744U-21 told him," there will never be an end to them. The cosmos is a treasure house, my friend. And like a true man of Zor, I think that you will never grow weary of its delights—not till the stars grow cold, and darkness writes an end to the universe."

"And that," Professor Jameson assented humorously, "will be a long time from now."

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Super Science Stories,
Address: The Editor,
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THINGS are looking up all over. All of you seem to think that the last issue was the best yet; Larry Shaw has seen the light; and the next SUPER, as it shapes up now, is due to bring a passel of pleasant surprises. More than that we can't say; but keep your eye peeled for the November issue.

The response to the coupon we ran last issue was gratifying. Thanks to all who filled it out. Here's the way the votes add up:

1. Brain Beast 2.9
2. The Hunted 3.25
3. Wall of Darkness 4.25
 The Survivors
4. Changeling 4.5
5. Spaceman Beware! 4.58
6. Hand from the Stars 5.
7. Dreadful Dreamer 5.75
8. Gravity Trap 6.9
9. Science Fictioneer 7.1
10. Missives and Missiles 7.8
11. Fandom's Corner 8.

Dear Editor:

I don't know just what it was, but something told me that the July SSS would be well worth reading. My ghostly informant couldn't have been the proverbial little bird, because I never talk to birds anymore. (I once carried on quite a conversation with a friendly robin, but he no longer speaks to me because I prefer Hemingway to Saroyan.) Anyway, I am happy to report that Ye Current Issue fully lived up to expectations.

It is interesting to note the progress made by science fiction down through the years. Of course, the writing has improved in many respects and is a lot more subtle. But I think that the significant change lies in the underlying philosophy of the stories, and in the fact that most of the good writers are trying to do something more than just tell an adventure story —set up a problem and solve it with a liberal use of colored rays, fainting heroines, and the ever-present BEMs. They seem to be aiming at a meaning somewhat beyond the pressing events of the immediate plot. Well and good, say I—a big step in the right direction. (Amen. — Ed.)

There wasn't a single poor story this trip; pat yourself on the back and dole out extra portions of firewater to our esteemed authors. I'll just try to list the first four, but I do not intend to imply lack of merit in the others. Just a matter of taste, as the man said when he ate the lawn-mower.

1. CHANGELING, by Ray Bradbury. In my opinion, Bradbury is the best writer that science fiction has ever produced. Certainly, there can be little doubt that he is capable of great work—his stories in the O. Henry prize collections are a testimonial to this. There are not many top-rank American writers who have both the inclination and the peculiar talent required to write stfantasy—can you imagine what sort of science fiction Sherwood Anderson or John Steinbeck would have produced? We should be grateful for Bradbury. I cheerfully concede that CHANGELING is hardly representative of his best work, and I am aware that he

has used the same idea before. So what? For me, it is a telling allegory of an old relation between man and woman, and that is enough.

2. THE WALL OF DARKNESS, by Arthur C. Clarke. Clarke has a nice, restrained style that I like. The idea in this one is good, and well carried out.

3. THE HUNTED, by John D. MacDonald. MacDonald seems to be capable of all sorts of work—good, bad, and indifferent. This was one of the good ones.

4. THE SURVIVORS, by Bruce Walton. Perhaps not entirely successful as a story, but the ideas are commendable and the yarn has a certain power.

Mr. Pohl's book reviews are very fine indeed; it is nice to find a critical intellect at work in this department. I don't always agree with him, but his points are well taken. Missives and Missiles needs a new cut for the heading and a lot more space to move around in. Despite his unmerited panning, Larry Shaw, as usual, had the best letter. If you take the trouble to peer around the large amount of tongue in Friend Shaw's cheek, you may find considerable insight. (I realize what a horrible metaphor that is, Larry. Have a heart, lad—I'm sensitive.)

Enuf for now, no? Thanx for listening.

Sincerely,

Chad Oliver
Harper Star Route
Kerrville, Texas

Dear Editor:

Well, you're really not yet "The Big Book of Science Fiction" as your cover so optimistically proclaims, but every issue sees SSS getting nearer that exalted goal. You will never supplant the magazine occupying that position, however, unless such covers as the one on both the current issue and the last are junked, and astronomical or at least more toned-down cover-paintings are instituted. Not that I didn't like the cover; on the contrary, I most certainly did: it surpassed the one on April SSS, if that is possible, and no Finlay cover ever was better, though some are as good. (You like it, but we shouldn't a done it? Let us think that one over a while. We've had a bad week.—Ed.)

Incidentally is your "Lawrence" the pseudonym of that great illustrator of two other mags, Vern Stevens? (The same, sir. Readers of Adventure magazine know him as L. Sterne Stevens.)

If John MacDonald continues to turn out stories like his contribution in this issue, he will be likely to become THE HUNTED. By editors. That was the finest story in the issue, irregardless of the fact that it is not quite a new theme.

THE BRAIN BEAST was the only other really good tale, but inasmuch as it was the lead novel, I'll forgive you (kind being that I am.) Slightly Shaverian; but no matter.

SPACEMAN BEWARE by Stanley Mullen and Clarke's contribution also were worthy. I didn't like the Bradbury opus: it was worse than the first story wherein "Marionettes Inc." appeared.

For your benefit, the others ranked thus: THE SURVIVORS, GRAVITY TRAP, DREADFUL DREAMER, THE HAND FROM THE STARS.

Your departments are all fine. MISSIVES AND MISSILES, of course, is by far the best. Methinks above feature is being dominated by a handful; about half of the letters herein were by "authors" who had some in last time. The remedy? Why, this thing you are (I hope) reading.

Personally, I agree with Larry Shaw. (Now shut up, the rest of youse guys, lemme finish.) That is, IF. If he can produce something to replace the "stereotyped" plots. Personally, I can't; but if he can, I'm all for him. BUT IF HE CAN'T. . . . !!!

Incidentally, the best letter is Larry Shaw's.

Sincerely,

W. Paul Ganley
119 Ward Road
North Tonawanda, N. Y.
(& printer be careful!!)

Next we hear from a repentant and reformed Shaw. Next issue, we suppose, we'll have to run a "Why Everybody Loves Larry Shaw" department.

Dear Mr. Editor:

I wish to offer my sincere and humble thanks to those gentlemen and scholars, F. V. Scalzi, Clark E. Crouch, Sid Herman, and the members (21) of the Sickles Street Literary Society. Also, my apologies to all readers of

your splendid magazine. They have shown me the light. They have made me realize my mistakes, and I am filled with repentance and a deep desire for forgiveness.

I was all fouled up. I didn't know the score. I had been going along taking your title literally, thinking it meant Scientific Stories for Supermen. But now I have been all straightened out, have in fact taken the pledge. I have found my rung on the ladder of abstractions. I can look at SSS in its true perspective. I see it for what it is, and I find it good. And I owe it all to Scalzi, Crouch, Herman, and the Sickles Street gang.

I am all the more grateful since I read the letter section in the July issue first, and thus was enabled to enjoy the book thoroughly and rate it properly. I liked it. I liked the subdued colors of the cover painting and the gal thereon. I liked the fact that it said Science Fiction twice on the top of your contents page. I liked the idea of having the stories begin on pages 8, 52, 66, 80, 85, 98, 104, 112, and 116. I liked the blurbs.

I hardly feel qualified as yet to judge the stories; I simply don't have the knowledge, scientific and literary background, experience, wisdom, deep understanding, sense of justice, and critical ability for the job. At the risk of going out on a limb, however, and knowing that the fans will look upon my comments with tolerance, I will say that I liked them. William F. Temple certainly can put a lot of things in a story. I haven't read the MacDonald or the Clarke yet, but I'm sure I will like them. I didn't care for St. Clair's effort, but then I've always known I didn't understand women anyways. Mullen and Walton helped to uphold the high level of quality of the issue. I can't honestly say I cared much for the Bradbury, but I freely admit I couldn't have done better using the same words in the same order. I would like to see more stories like Damon Knight's penetrating exposé of the perils of an excess of gravity. I did not understand Neville's story, but this is undoubtedly my own fault. (I did like the cute little filler which followed it, incidentally.) I repeat, I liked the stories.

The one jarring note in the issue was the letter by one Al Wickham. Where does he come off, giving his opinions of the stories? I'd like to see what kind of a story he could write; I bet it would be about as interesting and exciting as the "Raise Hamsters" ad. A fine thing, calling your stories faulty, awful, confusing, stale, vile, and so forth. He isn't fit to touch the hem of Morley and De-Forest's Jello. I think he'd better retract some of his nasty remarks or somebody will place a black wreath on his doorstep. He should be in favor of much-maligned names. If anyone's name is more worthy of being maligned than his, I'd like to know whose it is. Look at the list of authors he likes if you want to laugh yourself silly! Imagine putting Blish in the same class with all those hams! Imagine saying people shouldn't learn to write in public! Just because you had to have a private tutor, Wickham, that doesn't mean everybody else took twelve years to learn their ABC's. And if you wouldn't pay a quarter to watch Gypsy Rose Lee practicing, you're not fit to keep human company. Why don't you crawl back in your hole and leave us intelligent, constructive, self-respecting fans alone in ours?

As for you, Mr. Editor, keep up the natural-born good work. SSS is wonderful; pay no attention to anybody named Wickham who tells you different.

Yours devotedly,
Larry Shaw
1301 State St.
Schenectady 4, N.Y.

Dear Editor:

The novel was very enjoyable reading. The four parts were tied together beautifully. This is what I call a near perfect combination of S-F and fantasy. The scenes in Jacksburg were particularly amusing. Tell me, is it not possibly true about Crosse and Faraday and the bugs? (Possibly, but not probably.—Ed.)

"The Hunted" is one of my favorite S-F subjects and it was nicely handled. I would like to see a novel based on this kind of situation.

"The Wall of Darkness" was fascinatingly written. Clarke is one of my favorite authors and he didn't let me down.

"Dreadful Dreamer" — Maggy can always be depended on for an interesting, if not spectacular, story.

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

I wish Larry Shaw would shut up. I wish he'd remember that since he reads S-F and writes letters to mags (which unfortunately are printed) he is classified as a fan (tho it's a disgrace to the rest of us.) Therefore, why doesn't he quit slamming us? He's just slamming himself too. What's the matter, Larry? Mad at fans because some fan club excluded you because of your sweet disposition?

To conclude, thanks to you, ed, for making SSS the only high-class space opera mag in the field.

Bill Searles
827 Nathan Hale Road
West Palm Beach, Fla.

Dear Editor:

Hah! You won't like this, but I'm not writing so much about the present issue as about one fan who has some sense—Larry Shaw.

Of course, I will mention the stories—as shortly as possible.

THE BRAIN BEAST: Seems I've heard William F. Temple is just another name for William Fitzgerald Jenkins. True? (False.—Ed.) He can sure change his style if that's so.

CHANGELING: Better than his first Marionette story.

SURVIVORS: Will they never cease? Stories in which the race of Man is doomed, I mean. However, this one was different enough for me.

The rest? Well, they didn't stink, but most of them seemed rather common, with nothing to them really comment on. I know that new ideas are hard to find, but couldn't authors at least twist old ideas more? St. Clair's DREAMER; what else could have happened? (Plenty—but Mrs. St. Clair didn't see to want to tear away from the old formula.) And as for THE HUNTED—well, when I first started reading this type, I liked it, but that's been quite a few years ago, and no really creditable change seems to have been made. In short, I agree with Shaw: NEW, something new!

I believe someone made a crack about Shaw's remark that spaceships should be done away with—they asked how people could travel without rockets. Simple—a matter transmitter. That would do away with the hackneyed descriptions of "giant planets majestically floating in a black void"

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"the green globe of Earth swelling in the viziplate," etc. Somebody holler that it would also take the life-blood from science-fiction? If so, I answer with a loud. NUTS! I've read dozens, hundreds, maybe even thousands of good stories that never once mentioned space travel. Think of the possibilities for different description in transmitter travel, anyway — the strange feelings that would pass thru a person as the atoms of his body painlessly disassociated, the thoughts that would flicker thru his mind before final b r i e f unconsciousness — the glimpse into worlds-that-were-not-worlds, the ghosts of the unborn whispering into his mind. That field has hardly been touched.

Disgustedly loyal,
Shelby Vick
411 Jenks
Panama City, Fla.

Dear Editor:

Now let's see, I gotta start with a witty lead-off line so you'll get interested in this letter and keep on reading. But since I can't I'll start on the cover. Only one flaw in this otherwise thrilling tableau. Da dame should be dead, a gory mass of exploding flesh and bloody internal organs, a truly gruesome sight. That is, if that is the surface of the Moon outside.

Temple comes through with his best story to date. Really worthwhile reading here. No other comment.

MacDonald is becoming a dependable word-fitter. Liked this yarn of his. He can write almost any type of s-f now. All good.

Clarke is really going places in the last few months and this short is up to par. The story is reminiscent of the middle 30's type of science-fiction. (The Bok is wonderful!)

St. Clair has been turning out better stories lately but this one didn't take with me. Read a much better one on this theme in an old SUPER SCIENCE. By Hasse I think.

Bradbury flopped. A horrible thing for a Bradburyite like me to say but he did. His first Marionettes yarn was bad enough without doing it again!

Whoops, missed up-and-coming Mullen who writes a very satisfactory brand of stf. Don't let dis guy get away!

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

Walton is back and SSS got him. Very good and very different from his bitter, hard-hitting style used when he first started in the writing game. Wrench a novelette away from him sometime, huh?

Knight. Where has he been all these years? Wasting his time spelling his name in small letters, doing pretty good art-work but writing very little. Crack the whip at him some more, huh? (Who, us?—Ed.)

Neville (this a pen-name?) has a good yarn here. Only I guessed what would happen.

All in all, the fiction was, despite what Larry Shaw will say, satisfactory and enjoyable, enough so that I'll keep plunking down the 25c which is, after all, the main idea ain't it? (Right. Roger.—Ed.)

As for the storm raging above Mr. Shaw's superstructure, I think he's cackling gleefully at the fracas he's started. Anybody remember Larry Shaw, the Hermit? But enuf, too many are already boiling in this little teapot tempest.

What I'd like to see in SSS is something very much like "GENUS HOMO" (de Camp & Miller) of so many years ago in SSS. Or Henry Hasse's MISSION UNKNOWN. And where's Asimov? And a Bok cover. But come what may, I'm buying, and reading, and writing, so keep it up, friend.

Yours and all that,

Ed Cox
4 Spring St.
Lubec, Maine, U.S.A.
Terra, Solar System, etc.

Dear Ed:

This ish is the second straight have picked up, and both by accident. From now on when I pick it up there will be no accident about it.

In my judgment the best story in the Jully issue was, by a nose, SPACEMAN, BEWARE! Second THE SURVIVORS. Third, THE WALL OF DARKNESS. The first three were practically tied. Fourth, THE HAND FROM THE STARS. I like happy endings but I can't help it, this ending was so subtle. Fifth, THE HUNTED. All right, not too good. Now we come to the booby prize region. DREADFUL



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DREAMER is sixth. CHANGELING, kind of stupid, takes seventh. "Have a little strychnine, sir?" GRAVITY TRAP eighth, all around poor with a vague ending. Reads like Knight was given half an hour notice of a deadline. And finally THE BRAIN BEAST, numbah nine. Mr. Temple wrote this well, but it looks like a clumsy attempt to make man irresponsible for his own wrongdoing. All right, so I shot the President, the Id made me do it. Ha ha ho hoh.

As a gamin I would like to say that Mr. Shaw's letters would be vastly more witty if he typed with both hands behind his back.

Sincerely,
Keran O'Brien
P.O. Box 12
West Goshen, Conn.

Dear Editor:

I am just waiting to see what sort of comments, pro or con, filter in regarding the story by Kris Neville called "THE HAND FROM THE STARS!"

I have known him since 1939, and felt all along that all he had to do was try it once. This story is swell. One of the best in the ish, "The Survivors" and "Gravity Trap" being the sole rivals.

Yet, strange to say, I am going to register the first compaint! It seems to me that the hero was in suspended animation much longer than he was intended to be. Was a line or two edited telling about this? He couldn't have been gone just two centuries because if he came back to Earth in our time, which seems to be implied, then, it stands to reason that he left Earth during recorded history. And we know of no race advanced to the point of space-travel on an interplanetary level, let alone one far enough along to build a star ship, could have been on Earth even three thousand years ago, let alone two hundred. (See p. 119, second column, seventh paragraph.—Ed.)

I can't decide who drew the illo with this story. (Leydenfrost.—Ed.)

Let's have more stories by Kris Neville!

Sincerely,
Bob Barnett
1107 Lyon
Carthage, Mo.

FANDOM'S CORNER

(Continued from page 7)

Oreg. 25¢. This is the original photo-offset vest-pocket fan mag. This issue has a luscious cover by D. B. Berry. All articles, fiction and reviews are excellent, but we'll pick the department, "Author, Author," which features Will F. Jenkins, as the best in the issue. This mag is a must for all fans.

Spacewarp, April 1949, published monthly by A. H. Rapp, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Mich. 15¢ An interesting high-stepping mag on the lighter side of fandom. A new idea is being tried out on the cover, a combination of mimeoing and hecto.

Peon, May 1949, published bimonthly by Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, 2116 Edsall Court, Alameda, Calif. 10¢. This is the first anniversary issue. It contains material by David H. Keller, Robert Bloch and Anthony Boucher among others. Well mimeographed, 32 pages.

Fantasy Commentator, Spring 1949, published quarterly by A. Langley Searles, 7 E. 235th St. New York 66, N.Y. 25¢. A must for fantasy and science-fiction collectors. Featured, as usual, is Moskowitz's history of fandom, "The Immortal Storm," Part 15.

Scientifantasy, No. 2, published quarterly by Bill Kroll, 1031 W. 18th St., Des Moines, Iowa, and is co-edited by John Grosman. This new vest-pocket magazine is one of the best illustrated in the field. Book reviews, fiction, articles and a cartoon strip go a long way to make it one of the best.

Flub, March 1949, published monthly by Wallace Shore, Box 1565, Billings, Mont. Co-editor, Phil Waggoner. 5¢. 10 mimeoed pages and a good cover by Rotsler. This is a verse issue.

Bloomington News Letter, April 1949, published bimonthly by Bob

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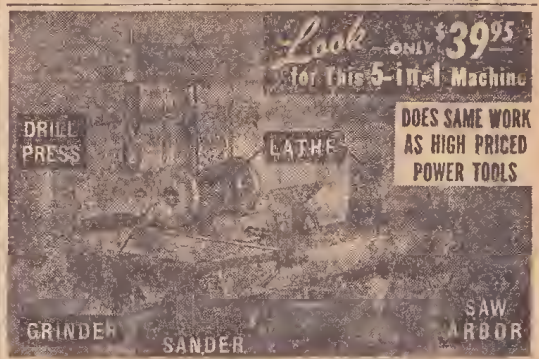
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Tucker, P.O. Box 260, Bloomington, Ill. No price listed. 6 pages, large size, photo-offset, containing news, book reviews and Tuckerisms.

Dawn, "The Fanzine from Kentucky," April, 1949, published by Lester Fried, 2050 Midland, Louisville 4, Ky. 10¢. Fandom's only letter magazine at present, it is legal-sized, mimeographed.

Alien Culture, April 1949, published by Jim Leary, 4718 Forest Hills Road, Rockford, Ill. 15¢. Cover is photo-offset, interior mimeographed. A neat, well edited mag with good articles and verse. "Short stories of Clark Ashton Smith," by Eldred Smith and, "If," by Walter A. Coslet strike us as the best items in the issue.

Luna, No. 1, edited by Bob Johnson, 811 9th St., Greeley, Colo. 20¢. A newcomer to the fan field, this one is written, published and edited by teenagers.

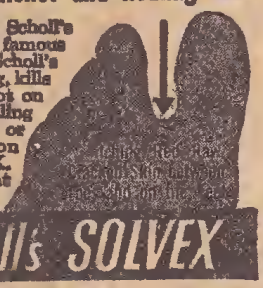
The cover is silk-screened, the interior is poorly hectographed.

Viton, No. 1, organ of the Eugene Science Fantasy Society, published bimonthly by Roscoe Wright and Norman E. Hartman, 146 E. 12th St., Eugene, Oregon. No price listed. 16 pages, mimeographed, and not bad for a first issue. One story, numerous articles and features.

Fantasy-Times, No. 81, published semimonthly by Fandom House, c/o James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, N.Y. 10¢. Features Thomas S. Gardner's "1948 In Science Fiction" which this issue reviews the 1948 issues of FANTASTIC NOVELS. Cover by Herman Tok.

All fan mags to be reviewed should be sent to Fandom's Corner, c/o SUPER SCIENCE STORIES, 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N.Y.



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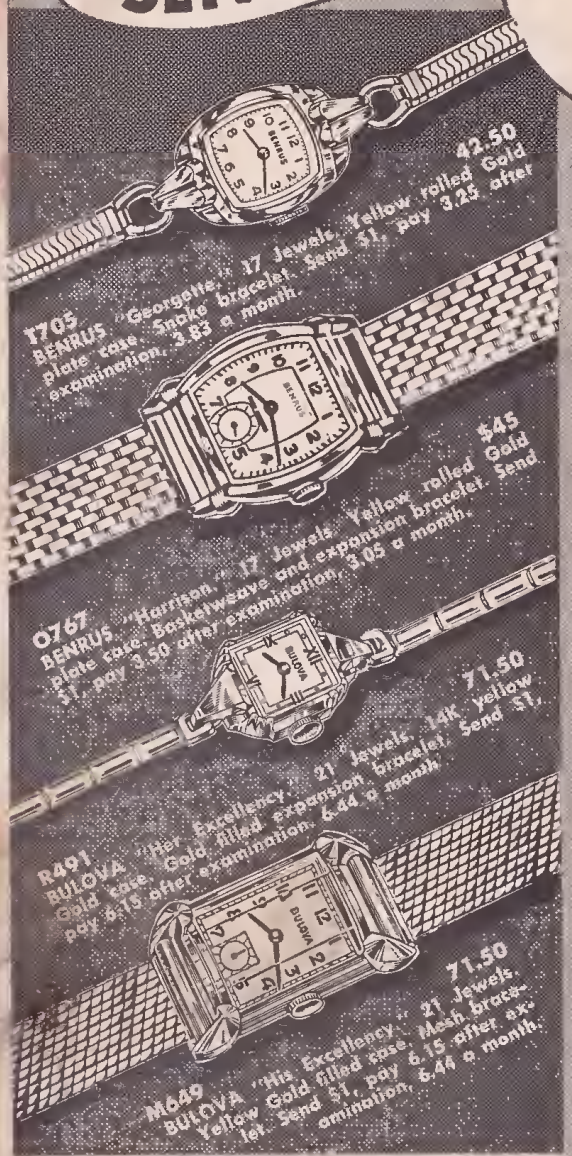
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